

“God’s Final Word”

Heb. 1:1-2a

- INTRO. - ILL. – In Seminary most preachers are taught how to write a good introduction to a sermon. Most of the time it is good to begin with an interesting story or illustration that will grab the audience’s attention.

- And, as we have seen, the Book of Hebrews is more like a sermon than a letter (although it ends like a letter). But the interesting thing is, the author of Hebrews begins this “sermon” by jumping right into his main point.

- In fact, the first four verses comprise one of the greatest single sentences in all the Word of God. Although some English translations have this in several sentences, in the Greek it is all one sentence. And in this one sentence he lays out everything he is going to develop in this book.

- The overall theme of the book is that Jesus Christ is superior to *everyone* and *everything*. One of the primary key words is the word “better.” All through this book the author presents Jesus as “better than.” In particular He is better than anything the old covenant can provide.

- And this opening sentence is one of the most elegant, majestic, and rhetorically eloquent sentences in Scripture. It is an extremely long, multi-claused sentence that sets out the key themes which will be developed in the next few chapters.

- This sentence is also (theologically) filled to overflowing. The entire sentence is built on the primary clause, “God has spoken.” It begins with the subject of divine revelation – and the point is that God has spoken His final (and greatest) word through His Son.

- This book does *not* begin with who wrote it, or who it was written to, but it begins with the glorious announcement that God has spoken – and He has given His final word through the sending of His Son.

- In fact, (as we will see) this final word that God has spoken in His Son is so final that nothing else needs to be said. We have need of no further word of revelation.

- Now, even though the first four verses are all one sentence, it falls into two main divisions of thought. Verses 1-2a deal with the subject of divine revelation, and verses 2b-4 delineate the Person and work of Christ.

- For our purposes today, we will only focus on this first part. We have a very simple outline this morning, and we begin with:

I. THE CONTEXT (v. 1)

- Look with me at v. 1, “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways...” What is being described in v. 1 is the revelation

of God we now call the Old Testament. Ultimately the purpose for the OT was to prepare God's people for the coming of Christ.

- In the OT there are prophecies, types, promises, and illustrations that clearly point to the ultimate revelation of God's Son. And notice that the primary message (here) is the "God...spoke."

- Fundamental to the author's message is the conviction that God has *not* remained silent, but has taken the initiative to reveal Himself to men. This initial affirmation is basic to the entire argument of this book – in fact, it is basic to the Christian faith.

- Yahweh is *not* the god of the deist, a god that creates the world and then removes himself to let it run on its own. He is *not* detached from His creation, or uninvolved with His creatures. The God of the Bible is *not* like the false gods of men's own making. He is *not* like dumb idols that can neither speak nor act.

- And unlike the impersonal "First Cause" of the philosophers, our God is *not* silent. He wants us to know Him, and therefore He has spoken. But the truth of the matter is, that if God had *not* spoken to us, we would never know about Him and His redemptive purposes.

- Because we are bound by the natural realm, we cannot know anything about the supernatural realm apart from revelation. What this passage of Scripture is dealing with

(here) in *not* the *general* revelation of creation or conscience, but the *special* revelation of the Word of God.

- Yes, we have a general understanding of the existence of God and His majesty through His creation, and yes, we have the inner witness of His existence through our conscience, but we can never really know about Him apart from special revelation.

- And *here* we are told that the revelation given in the OT was partial and incomplete. The terms that are used (here) indicate that the OT was "progressive revelation." That doesn't mean it was erroneous – just that it was incomplete. It came at different times and in different ways, but it was *not* the final and full revelation of the NT.

- It was (in fact) God speaking, but He did *not* reveal Himself (and His redemptive plan) *fully* until the sending of His Son. As beautiful, and important, and authoritative as the OT is – it is a revelation that is fragmentary and incomplete.

- As you may know, it was delivered over a period of more than 1500 years by some 40 plus writers. It contains bits and pieces of revelation – truth that builds upon other bits and pieces of revelation.

- This revelation did *not* build from error to truth, but from incomplete truth to complete truth. All of it is God's

absolute truth, but it was *not* complete until the canonization of the NT. Progressive revelation is revelation that progresses from promise to fulfillment. The OT is the promise, the NT is the fulfillment.

- Do you remember what Jesus said in Matt. 5:17? He said, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets [that is, the OT]; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill.” The first coming of Christ represented the age of fulfillment.

- And you might think of progressive revelation like a rheostat (or dimmer switch). The revelation of God began at its dimmest setting in the OT, became brighter and brighter – but it did *not* reach its brightest point until the revelation of God in His Son.

- Or another way to look at it, is to see it as similar to the way children learn. Children are first taught letters, then words, then sentences, and finally arguments. So (in a way) you might consider the OT the “picture book” of types and symbols – all of which progressed to their full depiction in Christ.

- But the progressive revelation of the OT is seen in many ways. For example, God revealed to Moses something he never revealed to Abraham (the Law), He revealed to David something He never revealed to Moses (the Coming Messiah), etc.

- In fact, the OT itself tells us that some of the things that were revealed by God to the prophets were *not* even understood by the prophets themselves. They were men of faith who did were trusting a promise they did *not* yet fully understand.

- In Heb. 11 we will see a number of the great saint from the OT period. And Heb. 11:39 says of them, “...all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised...” In other words, they were still living by faith, *not* yet having seen the fulfillment of the promises of God. By faith they were able to “see it” without ever experiencing it.

- Many times they were given revelation that was so far into the future that they could *not* even conceive of its fulfillment. And this (for them) included the first advent of Christ.

- The Apostle Peter wrote (in 1 Peter 1:10-12), “As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that *would come* to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven-- things into which angels long to look.”

- The prophets in the OT did not understand these things concerning Christ, but they wrote about them, inspired by the Spirit of God, even though they did *not* really grasp the significance of the coming fulfillment of these things in Christ.

- And notice that this revelation was given “to the fathers in the prophets.” The word “fathers” is a reference to those under the older covenants. It is a reference to anyone under the OT dispensation. These are our spiritual ancestors.

- And God spoke to these OT people through His prophets. But understand here, the word for “prophets” is *not* limited to the “major” and “minor” writing prophets. Rather, this is used in a general way to speak of anyone who spoke God’s Word. Perhaps we should generalize the word “prophets” to mean “messengers.”

- Therefore this would include people like Moses, David, Joshua, the Patriarchs, etc. – anyone in the OT era that spoke for God.

- However, (having said that) it is likely that the phrase “in the prophets” refers to the things the prophets have written, therefore this is limited to the words of the OT Scriptures. The only divine revelation we have is the revelation that God has given us in Scripture.

- But we also need to remember that the OT Scripture is just as divinely-inspired as the NT Scripture. 2 Tim. 3:16

declares, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.”

- Just because the OT revelation is partial and incomplete does *not* mean it is any less inspired or any less profitable to us. In fact, it is *foundational* to everything we have in the NT.

- John MacArthur writes, “The Old Testament is...not [God’s] complete truth, but it is completely His truth. It is God’s revelation, His progressive revelation, preparing His people for the coming of His Son, Jesus Christ.”

- And notice the manner in which this revelation was given. It was given “in many portions and in many ways...” There is a play on words (here) in the Greek: “polumeros” and “polutropos.”

- The first one, “polumeros,” literally means “in many different parts.” It has been translated into English as “sundry times,” (that is the KJV), “many portions” (in the sense of portions of books), and “many parts.” This emphasizes that each part of this revelation was incomplete. It was only partial.

- The other word (polutropos) means “in many different ways.” The KJV has “divers manners.” The idea (here) is that God was *not* limited in the *manner* in which He spoke. He spoke to Moses face to face. He spoke to

Moses from a burning bush. He spoke to prophets through visions and dreams. He even spoke to His through a donkey.

- God spoke through the awesome thunderings of Mount Sinai and through the still small voice to Elijah on Mount Horeb. He spoke through breathtaking theophanies and through the commands of His Law.

- This would include all the various writing styles and genres of literature we see in the OT Scripture. It includes things like poetry, parables, wisdom sayings, precepts, narrative, and many others.

- And the amazing thing about this, is that God used a multitude of ways in which He spoke, but it was always Him speaking. He used the various personalities of the prophets (in this general sense) but what was written was His divine revelation.

- As 2 Peter 1:21 clearly proclaims, “No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.” That refers to the OT as well as the new. No human author of the OT was writing by an act of his human will, but what they wrote was inspired by the Holy Spirit of God.

- Each person was controlled by the Spirit of God in such a way that what was produced was the infallible Word of God. And again, just because what they wrote was *not*

complete, does *not* mean that it was erroneous in any way.

- Although it was progressive revelation, it was trustworthy revelation. Although it was partial, it was reliable. Although it was incomplete, it was (in fact) the divinely-revealed Word of God.

- The OT is *not* just a collection of human wisdom or ancient writings – it is the infallible Word of God. It is God speaking. So this is the *context*, from which he moves on to his main point, which is:

II. THE CONTRAST (v. 2a)

- Go on to v. 2, “in these last days [He] has spoken to us in *His Son...*” Jesus Christ is the final and complete revelation of God. And what we have in this first phrase of v. 2 is a reference to the NT. It is *not* limited to Jesus’ Person or words, it is speaking of the totality of the revelation God gave to us in the NT Scriptures.

- And what I want you to see (here) is the clear contrast between v. 1 and v. 2. The revelation of God is presented in four parallel contrasts, relating to eras, recipients, agents, and methods.

- As to eras, “long ago” is contrasted with “in these last days.” In regard to the recipients, the contrast is between “the fathers” and “to us.” The agents are “in the prophets”

contrasted with “in His Son.” And the methods are contrasted by the phrase “in many portions and in many ways” as compared with “in one way” (which is implied here).

- Now, I want to go back and spend a little time on each one of these important contrasts. The eras mentioned (here) contrast two dispensations. The phrase “long ago” (or formerly, or in the past) is pointing to the OT era prior to the coming of the Messiah.

- *That* is contrasted by the phrase “in these last days.” That phrase has nothing to do with the end of the present age, but refers to the days of fulfilment with the coming of Christ into the world.

- You see, the Jews divided all time into two ages: the age of promise and the age of fulfilment. So when a Jew would hear this phrase “the last days” he would have thoughts of the coming of the Messiah.

- Of course, that phrase is used in Scripture to refer to the events surrounding the Second Coming of Christ and the end of the present church age, but that can’t be the way it is being used here, because the author of Hebrews says “THESE last days.”

- He is clearly speaking of the days in which he was alive and giving this message. So it is obvious he has in mind the *first* coming Christ as the final and complete revelation of God.

- These are the “last days” of which he is speaking. It was the conviction of the author of Hebrews that those days had already been initiated when he wrote this book.

- But even with *this* understanding of the phrase “these last days,” there are still a number of possibilities as to its application. It *could* refer to the last days of revelation. It *could* mean that, since these are the last days of the revelation of God to man, that *this* means there is nothing else that can be added to it. So in that sense, it would be pointing to the finality of this revelation.

- Or it *could* mean that these are the last days in the sense of eschatological fulfilment. This is how the Jews would have been thinking. As I mentioned, when the Jews heard the phrase “the last days,” they would have thought about the coming of the Messiah.

- Time (for them) was divided between promise and fulfilment. And (as John MacArthur explains) “whenever a Jew saw or heard these words he immediately had messianic thoughts, because the scriptural promise was that in the last days Messiah would come...”

- We just saw examples of this in our study of Zechariah. In 9:9 it says, “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout *in triumph*, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.”

- This (of course) was fulfilled in Christ, but the point is, that the age of promise gave way to the age of fulfilment. When Christ came into Jerusalem on the back of that donkey, He announced to them that He was (indeed) the Lord's Messiah, and that He had come in fulfilment of the great promise.

- Do you remember when Jesus appeared to some disciples on the road to Emmaus (after His resurrection)? In Luke 24:27 we are told, "And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures."

- This tells us that everything in the OT was to point to Christ. So the author of Hebrews is saying, "In these promised last days Messiah (Christ) has come and has spoken the final revelation of God."

- As to the recipients, the "fathers" were those who lived in the OT era. And while the older revelation (to them) was expansive, it was partial and incomplete. But in contrast to that, the revelation of these last days has come "to us," that is, to those under the NT era.

- This final revelation is for all those who are the recipients of the Christian message. In fact, the anonymity of Hebrews makes it even more universal in its application to all Christians. This revelation was *not* just for the original recipients of this book (whoever they

were). It is for all those under this dispensation of the church age.

- In regard to the contrast between the agents of this message, the "prophets" (in the OT) were unable to match the revelation God ultimately gave "in His Son."

- From Adam to Moses (through 2500 years) and from Moses to Malachi (through 1100 years) the prophets were speaking for God to man. But at the end of the 3600 years their revelation (of God and His purposes) was still partial and incomplete. But after 400 years of silence, "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son," and in that Son the revelation of God became perfect and complete.

- God's final word began to be realized when the angel Gabriel proclaimed to Mary, "You shall call His name Jesus." It was announced by the angel to the shepherds, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (Luke 2:10-11)

- And in regard to the methods, the "many portions and various ways" became "one way" – through the Son. All the fragmentary parts of God's previous revelation became one complete whole in Christ Jesus.

- The revelation God brought forth in His Son was the full and complete revelation of Himself and His purposes.

The word of God in the NT became the pinnacle of His revelation to man.

- I love how one author put it. He said, “All the books of the Old Testament, like tributaries into a mighty river, merge into the last Word of God to man, Jesus. All the shadows became substance in Him. All of the voices of the prophets merge together in one triumphant shout, Glory to the Son of God.”

- God’s full and perfect revelation awaited the coming of His Son. God, who used to speak in many different ways through many different people, has (in finality) spoken in one single way – through His only begotten Son.

- The NT revelation is the revelation of the Son of God. Everything in the NT is centered in Him. The Gospels tell the story of His life and ministry, the epistles explain the theological significance of that, and the Revelation tells us of the culmination of His work.

- From beginning to end, the NT is all about Christ – and this is God’s final word. *That* revelation is *not* fragmented and partial like the former revelation. It is perfect and complete.

- No prophet (in the OT) was given God’s full and final revelation. *That* revelation was given to many men, in bits and pieces and fragments.

- To Noah was revealed the quarter of the world from which Messiah would come. To Micah the town where he would be born. To Daniel, the time of his birth, to Malachi, the forerunner who would go before Him. To Jonah, His resurrection was typified.

- All these pieces of revelation was true and accurate, and each one related to the others in some way or another. And each of them pointed to the coming of the Messiah.

- And this revelation was communicated in a variety of ways. It came through visions and dreams, through direct inspiration, through types and symbols.

- But God’s final revelation in Christ was different. It was full, final, perfect, and complete. Only in Christ was everything brought together and made whole. The message (here) is that the Messiah has come, and in Him God’s revelation to man is complete.

- The verb “has spoken” (in v. 2) is in the aorist, indicative form. That means that this speaking is final and complete. It is a full and final word. It is a completed action that never needs to be repeated. And that leads us to the final point in our outline (this morning) which is:

III. THE CONCLUSION

- What does all this mean for us today? First of all, it means that we do *not* need any further word of revelation.

The revelation of God is complete and final with the canonization of the NT.

- We don't need any more prophets (especially fallible ones). We don't need new words of revelation. We don't need new prophecies. We don't need visions and dreams and mystical impressions. We have everything we need in the complete Word of God.

- We have the final and full revelation of God in Scripture. The NT provides the full and complete revelation of God to man.

- Listen, the next time you hear that televangelist say he has a new word from God, don't believe him. God isn't giving any new revelation. The next time you hear someone say that he has had a vision or a dream, don't take that as some new word from God. It isn't.

- Oh sure, people *do* have dreams and impressions, but that doesn't mean they are words from God. They aren't. Even lost people have dreams and impressions. But to say that God is speaking through these things, or to say that this is a new word from God is blasphemous in light of what the Word of God declares here in Heb. 1:1-2.

- You see, the truth of the matter is, there are still a lot of Christians today who believe God is still speaking in many portions and in many ways. They fail to recognize that the story of divine revelation is a story of progression up to Christ, but that there is no progression beyond that.

- We have no need for any further progression in the revelation of God. Jesus Christ is the complete and perfect revelation of God – and the canonization of the NT provides everything we need for life and godliness. We don't need any new revelation.

- This also means that the Word of God is absolutely sufficient. Our faith is *not* based on some kind of new word from God (especially from a fallible prophet) but it is based on the complete, inerrant, sufficient Word of God that we call the Bible.

- What we must realize is, that in His Son, God has said all he needs to say. When the OT prophets spoke, they were revealing a portion of the mind of God, but when Jesus spoke it was God Himself speaking.

- And in the NT we have the full mind of God revealed. The Word God spoke through Jesus is complete and total. It needs no supplement. It needs no addition. Everything we need to know about God is found therein. Everything we need to know to be saved eternally and to live a life that is pleasing to God is found therein. We don't need anything else.

- And (of course) at the end of the NT we find very strong warnings against adding to or taking away from the completed revelation of God. Rev. 22:18-19 says, "I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God shall add to

him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.”

- My friend, what about you? Do you have complete confidence in God final and complete Word? Do you have the assurance that this revelation is all we need? Have you come to know God's Son through saving faith? Are you living by the final word of God to man?

- PRAYER