

Knowing God

¹ Long ago, at many times and in many ways,
God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,
² but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son ...

Hebrews 1:1-2a

Can I Know God?

REVELATION. I'M NOT TALKING ABOUT THE BOOK, but the idea. A *revelation* is something that has been *revealed*. When something is revealed, it means that prior to this it was not revealed, meaning that the information was **hidden**, **unknown**, or even a **secret**. The book of Hebrews begins by asserting something about this idea of revelation. Its very first point is to tell us about how we know God.

How can you know God? This is one of the most

important questions you can ask yourself, especially if what the Bible has to say about God is true. People have come up with all kinds of different answers to this question. Some say that they know about God through **dreams** and **visions**. Others say that God gives them personal “**words of knowledge**.” Others say that **holy men** tell us about him. Others that God speaks to them **everywhere**. Still others that there **isn't a God** in the first place and the whole question is absurd. How can we know the answer to this question? Better, *can* we know the answer to it? How could we ever know? These are the questions we will try to answer today.

Hebrews: Introduction

Purpose

Before anything else, let's try to discover some facts and learn a little bit about Hebrews as a whole. This is a profoundly deep and rich book. It is a full course meal, not merely spiritual milk. It has been among the very favorites in the Bible since it was first recognized by the earliest church as Holy Scripture, and this apparently occurred very early. **1 Clement** is a book that is usually contained in the collection of books called the Apostolic Fathers, meaning that it

belongs to the very earliest of all Christian literature penned after the Apostles passed away, after the NT was finished. **Clement** was bishop of **Rome** in the first century and wrote his book around 96 A.D. He has an entire chapter that is taken almost entirely from Hebrews 1,¹ and it has been noted that there are as many as forty-seven places that Clement made use of Hebrews.² This means Hebrews was well known and widely circulated by that time.

Hebrews is probably the **high water mark of biblical theology** in all the world (Romans being a more systematic treatment of theology). Biblical theology identifies distinctive themes in various sections of the Bible, tracing them from one section to another, and discovering any overall unifying theme that draws the whole Bible together.³ Though not a modern biblical theologian, the author of Hebrews is clearly interested in tracing themes from the age of the OT and reading them in light of the age in which he finds himself. The depth of its theology probably helps us identify who its main original audience was, which we will

¹ See chart at the end of the sermon.

² Edgar J. Goodspeed, "First Clement Called Forth by Hebrews," *JBL* 30:2 (1911):157 [157-60].

³ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 339.

look at momentarily.

The **genre of Hebrews** is a **letter**, though not a traditional letter in every sense. At the end of the book he writes, “... **for I have written to you briefly**” (**Heb 13:22**), and then he goes on to give the traditional kinds of greetings and benedictions that we find especially in the letters of Paul. However, unlike Paul’s letters, there is **no opening greeting** or statement of the audience or where the letter was being sent or anything like that. This is because Hebrews is more than a letter.

In the same sentence that it is called a letter it also identifies itself as a **sermon**.⁴ He writes, “**Bear with my word of exhortation**.” (**Heb 13:22**). This phrase is used only one other time in the NT. In Acts 13 it says, “**After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to [Paul and Barnabas], saying, ‘Brothers, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, say it’**” (**Acts 13:15**). So Paul stood up and began to preach a sermon.

⁴ See David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 25; J.L. Bailey and L.D. Vander Broek (*Literary Forms in the New Testament* [London: SPCK, 1992] 193; Steve Stanley, “The Structure of Hebrews from Three Perspectives,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 45, no. 2 (1994): 250 [245-70]; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Rev. ed., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 25.

As a sermon then, it was sent out to be preached in the churches, not just one but many, the whole thing by itself as we did in our own church last week.

When we combine these facts—it is a profoundly deep biblical theology, it is a letter, and it is a sermon—It helps us discern *its purpose*, which is always important in trying to get a grasp on what is before us. When reading straight through the sermonic-letter, it becomes immediately apparent that these Christians were being warned against *falling away from the faith*. There are *five great warning passages* interspersed throughout the letter (*2:1–4; 3:7–4:13; 5:11–6:12; 10:19–39; 12:1–29*). But around all of these warnings, there is rich *theology focusing on Jesus Christ* and the new covenant and how everything about the present age is better than the one that came before it.⁵ Therefore, I would *summarize the purpose of the sermon as being an exhortation not to fall away from the Faith by understanding, believing, and appropriating the supremacy of Jesus Christ in all things*. This is why the letter was written. This is what the sermon hopes to instill in the hearer.

⁵ One of many possible outlines of Hebrews works around these passages. See Appendix 1.

Author

A few other facts will help us as we move into our study of Hebrews. All of them are controversial because we just don't have enough information. Nevertheless, it can be helpful to come to some conclusions, even if they may be wrong, because it will help us see a likely context of the letter. First, **who wrote Hebrews**? Probably no book in the Bible has seen more controversy than this. Around the fifth century, it became pretty standard to say that **Paul** was the author (Augustine, Jerome). Many people still argue for this today. There are some good reasons to think this. However, there are also plenty of things that make us suspicious, including the fact that this is a rather late acceptance in the early church. Notice simply **the placement of the book** in your Bible. It comes right *after* all of the Pauline books (Romans through Philemon). If it had been certain that Paul wrote it, you can bet that its placement would have been much closer to the first of these books (Paul's letters are all grouped together in your Bible), given that it is so vast in scope and depth, just like Romans, which is placed first. Its position shows you that from the start its Pauline authorship was in doubt (in fact, this placement in the NT canon is very,

very old, dating long before the fourth century). The fact that there is **no superscription** at the beginning telling us that Paul wrote it is also very suspicious, because he does this in all of his letters. Also, the style of the book, while clearly being familiar with Paul, does not really read like the rest of his letters.

Many candidates have been proposed, some from the very earliest days. These include **Barnabas** (Tertullian), **Luke** (Origen, Calvin), and **Apollos** (Luther). From here, modern scholars have come up with just about any option imaginable and in my cynicism I wonder if it isn't simply to publish something novel. These include Philip, Peter, John, Timothy, Priscilla, and even Mary the mother of Jesus.⁶

Recently, Dr. David Allen has made a persuasive case that **Luke is the author**.⁷ This suggestion has been around for a long, long time in one form or another. Some believed he translated an original Hebrew letter of Paul into Greek, but there is no evidence that Hebrews was originally written in Hebrew. Others thought that Luke was the author or editor

⁶ See the chart in David L. Allen, *Lukan Authorship of Hebrews*, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology (Nashville: TN, B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 13.

⁷ Ibid (minus page number). Also a shorter treatment in the Introduction of David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010). These are the sources I use for the historical reconstruction.

of the book. Even though Origen was familiar with Lukan authorship ideas, it may be at the end of the day that his famous remark, “As to who wrote the epistle, truly only God knows”² is what we are left with. But for purposes of preaching and some interesting applications we can see from it, I’m going to assume for several reasons (including the vast overlap of unique words found only in Luke-Acts and Hebrews,⁸ the use of medical language,⁹ and the author of Hebrews was clearly familiar Paul and perhaps no one fits this better than Luke)¹⁰ that **Luke is the author** or at least that he had a large part in the final composition of the book.

Setting: Date, Audience

Without arguing it, let me simply present a **possible audience and date** for the book by using things we gather from Hebrews itself and the assumption that Luke is the

² Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.14.

⁸ “Hebrews shares 53 words that occur elsewhere in the NT only in Luke-Acts, a significant number. In fact, two-thirds of the total vocabulary of Hebrews occur in Luke-Acts” (David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 48–49).

⁹ “... anatomical (ch. 4:12 f.), a dietetical (ch. 5:12–14), and a therapeutic passage (ch. 12:12 f.)” Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, trans. Thomas L. Kingsbury, Third Edition., vol. XXVIII, Clark’s Foreign Theological Library, Fourth Series (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1876), 415.

¹⁰ “Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry” (2Ti 4:11); cf. “Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, sends greetings to you, and so do Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke, my fellow workers” (Phlm 1:23–24); “Luke the beloved physician greets you, as does Demas” (Col 4:14).

author. We are somewhere three or four years prior to 70 A.D. and the destruction of the temple. Paul has been put to death in a Roman prison. Timothy, who had traveled to visit him just before he was killed had himself been thrown into a Roman prison, but has now been released.¹¹ Luke, his good friend and traveling companion on Paul's missionary journeys, is there with him in Rome,¹² and is preparing to write this sermon.

To whom is he writing? There is a good probability that **Luke is from Antioch in Syria**. At the very least, having traveled with Paul, he certainly knew many of the Christians there. Scholars are also now arguing that rather than a Gentile, he was actually a very well educated *Jewish* doctor, which accounts for his deep familiarity with the OT (and after spending all those years with Paul, it would only have grown). Now, in the very early days of the church, we read in **Acts 6:7** that **many of the temple priests**, Jews obviously, were converting to Christ. Josephus tells us that there were

¹¹ "You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon" (**Heb 13:23**).

¹² "Those from Italy greet you" (**Heb 13:24** NAS).

as many as 20,000 priests and another source says that as many as 7,000 were attached to the temple in Jerusalem.¹³

Of course, we know how the unconverted priests felt about Christians, and there were several persecutions in Jerusalem (cf. **Acts 8:1**) that forced Christians to flee Israel in the early days. This may even explain why there is no standard address in this book, because if had fallen into the wrong hands, it would have given away their location. At any rate, Antioch was a relatively close and free place to flee, and it had a growing church there, perhaps several churches. The Christian population was quite large by this time. These refugee priests undoubtedly were very well instructed in all things OT and temple, which is such a huge focus of Hebrews. They would have easily risen to some kind of teaching or leadership roles in Antioch.

But given the nature of human beings, what we know of Jewish and Gentile early Christians and the difficulties they had assimilating, given other false teachers and temptations to return to Judaism (Hebrews shows familiarity with Galatians on this point),¹⁴ and the difficulties these priests

¹³ Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, 198–207.

¹⁴ B. Witherington III, “The Influence of Galatians on Hebrews,” *NTS* 37 (1991): 146–52.

may have caused the Gentile leadership in the church(es) of Antioch, and finally that Luke himself has some contact with this city, he sets down to write a letter, especially to these Christian priests, but also to whatever other Christians there may be in that city in order to encourage them, warn them, and most of all bring their focus back onto Jesus Christ, who alone is the author and finisher of their faith.

The Last Days Are Here

With these things in mind, I want to look only at the first two (one and a half) verses of Hebrews now. What I want to look at is **two questions**. The first is how God speaks to us. The second is how God speaks to us *today*. The first question concerns the idea of revelation. The second frames this in the context of eschatology. The verses say, “**Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son**” (**Heb 1:1-2a**).

Notice immediately the contrast. “**Long ago**” is **contrasted with “in these last days.”** Something happened “long ago.” “**In days gone by**” is another translation, and

probably a better one since as we will see the contrast is not really the far distant past but two different ages. At any rate, the past is different from what is happening “in these last days.” Since this is the contrast, we can really only make sense of it once we understand what these two phases of time are. Thus, we will look at the question of “then vs. now,” that is the question of **biblical timing and eschatology** first.

The key here is the phrase “in these last days.” This is technical language. It is the language of the prophets. **Isaiah 2:2** says, “Now it will come about that in the last days, The mountain of the house of the LORD Will be established as the chief of the mountains, And will be raised above the hills; And all the nations will stream to it” (NAS). Jeremiah says, “The Anger of the LORD will not turn back; Until He has performed and carried out the purposes of His heart; In the last days you will clearly understand it” (**Jer 32:20** NAS).¹⁵ Obviously, this is talking about **some eschatological future time**. It is theological and redemptive time.

¹⁵ From the phrases below you can see (even if you can't read Greek) the relationship to Hebrews 1:2:

χάταις ἡμέραις (Isa 2:2)

υ τῶν ἡμερῶν (Jer 23:20)

υ τῶν ἡμερῶν (Heb 1:2)

But when it is? Paul says, “But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men” (2 Tim 3:1-9).

Growing up, this was the kind of passage we used to prove that the Tribulation was just around the corner. Obviously, when you read it, you understand that **you are living in the last days**. Nothing could be clearer than that. These things are all happening today. I have not changed my mind from my youth that we are living in the last days. I do

not know about the timing of a future Great Tribulation for the church. But one thing I have learned is to read the context. The Apostle isn't writing this for some 2,000 year distant Christian living in America. He is **writing it to the people at Ephesus in the first century** who have Timothy as their pastor. “**You, however ... all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted ... But as for you, continue in what you have learned...**” (10, 12, 14). Somehow, Paul thought that this talk about the last days was relevant for people living 2,000 years ago. He warned the Christians not to be like this. He believed that he was in the last days.

Why would he think that? Perhaps Peter taught him. If Luke is the author of Hebrews, the following verses take on more relevance, for he records Peter as saying, “**And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heavens above and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and**

vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Acts 2:17-21). This is the **first Christian sermon**. It was preached at Pentecost. And Peter is preaching this as if the “last days” were upon them at that very moment! Why? Because he sees that the Lord that people are to call upon is the Lord Jesus.

Peter is quoting from another prophet, **Joel 2:28-32**. But there is one difference. Joel says, “**And it shall come to pass afterward.**” Peter quotes this as if Joel had said, “In these last days...” In other words, Peter and Luke are putting this “afterward” time squarely as these “last days.” They see the “last days” as now, in their own day. This, they see as Joel’s “afterward.” And that is exactly what **Hebrews 1:2** says, “**In these last days [God] has spoken to us by his Son.**” What is it that has brought about the “last days?” Clearly, it is Jesus Christ.

So many people are so focused on the Second Coming that they miss how the First Coming of Jesus has **changed absolutely everything in the world**. There are reasons why his is the name that is blasphemed, why his is the birth that

marks the separation of time, and why he is the most written about person in human history, and why modern people are doing everything in their power to forget that he ever existed. His coming to this earth changed everything. For our purposes, it ushered in the “last days.” Really, the entire book of Hebrews is but a commentary on this point, explaining the many ways that this matters to us now. But for today, what we want to do is contrast their own and our own last days (they are the same days) with what Hebrews calls “long ago” or “in days gone by.” The word is a simple adverb in Greek: *palai*. Frieberg’s Lexicon has as its first meaning, “as indicating the past in relation to the present formerly (2P 1.9).”¹⁶

You see, just like B.C. and A.D. which exist because of him, **Jesus’ First Coming divides human history into two basic parts**. Our Gregorian Calendar (1582 A.D. which in turn goes back at least to **Dionysius Exiguus** in the 6th century) is a basic recognition of this fact. And it never ceases to amaze me that academia with secular Jewish scholars as the root think that changing the designations for C.E. and

¹⁶ It then gives a second definition “as indicating past time generally long ago, in time past” and cites Hebrews 1:1. I think Hebrews 1:1 fits better under the first definition as it is ages that are contrasted rather than long periods of time.

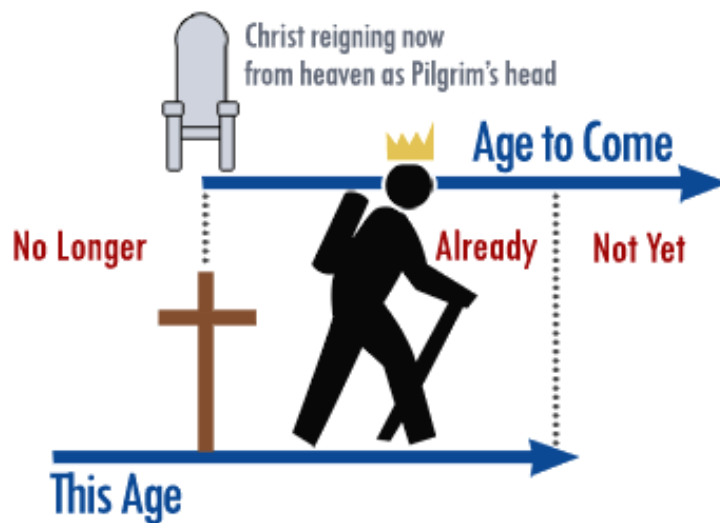
B.C.E. helps their non-Christian cause, for who exactly is it that still caused this radical shift in the way we count time if not Jesus?

The NT refers to the first part as “this present age” (*aion*; **Matt 12:32**; **1 Tim 6:17**; **Tit 2:12**; **Heb 9:9**), or “the present evil age” (**Gal 1:4**); or the time of “darkness” (**Luke 22:53**; **Eph 6:12**); or the “flesh” (*sarx*; **Rom 7:5**; **Gal 2:20**), or here as “days gone by.” It refers to a kingdom, the kingdom of darkness whose lord is the Devil, whose minions are the *stoichea* (“elemental spirits” ESV; **Gal 4:3**; **Col 2:8, 20**), who was given the nations at some point in time in the past (**Deut 32:8**; **Matt 4:8-9**) and which is passing away (**Matt 6:19-20**; **1 Cor 7:31**; **2 Pet 3:10**).

The second part is called “the age to come” (**Matt 12:32**; **Eph 1:21**); the “light” (**John 3:19**; **Rom 13:12**; **Eph 5:8**); the Spirit (**John 3:6**; **Heb 6:4-5**), or here, “the last days.” It refers to a different kingdom, one that is invisible to the senses, whose members belong by faith (**Luke 17:21**), whose Lord is Jesus Christ (**Matt 16:28**; **Col 1:13**; **Heb 1:8**), and whose kingdom shall have no end (**Isa 9:7**; **Dan 4:34**; **Luke 1:33**).

Now, if you listened carefully to those you will have noticed that you cannot neatly divide this up into the former

is OT and the latter is NT, because the evil age is “present” and yet the “last days” are also present. Children of light and children of darkness live together. Satan and Christ both have kingdoms now. And thus, history is more complicated than one age going away and the other coming in its place. Instead, there is an **overlap** that now exists. We are in both ages simultaneously. It can be depicted as something like this:¹⁷



¹⁷ **Going Deeper:** Some may wonder why the Apostle would bother telling the churches that all of these evil things would exist during the last days (cf. 2 Tim 3), when we all know that these things characterize all of humanity everywhere and all the time. The answer seems to be because some may have concluded that since Jesus has ushered in something brand new that perhaps his Age would not see such horrible things as these. In other words, maybe Christians and perhaps even the world become a utopia. Paul corrects this kind of thinking by showing them that, no, even in the glorious last days and the Age of the Spirit, wickedness will still continue in the world and in the churches. Therefore, his point is not to give a checklist so that you can know that the Tribulation is right around the corner. His point is to help you persevere in the midst of evil, evil that you may have convinced yourself should not exist anymore because Christ has come.

But though both ages are here now, this is itself a fundamental change in world history. In the OT era, the kingdom of Christ had not yet given birth. The OT was merely pregnant with it. And now, because it is here, there are some things that no longer obtain for us, that are no longer in place or effect because of the coming of Jesus Christ. One of these, as we will see later in the book, is the demanding place that the old covenant has upon us. We no longer offer animal sacrifices, for example. We no longer have a biological priesthood. We no longer fear the presence of God when he comes near to us. The old covenant has passed away. It no longer serves the purposes of God in redemptive history. Something greater has come. Something better has been inaugurated.

How We Know God

This is **foreshadowed** in our first verse, and in this way **Hebrews 1:1-2a** not only prepares you to understand the last days generally, but now gives you its first specific application

which deals with the difference now in “revelation,” or how God speaks today. How do we know God? To answer that question, first you must know that God can be known. Don’t take this for granted. A lot of people do. And a lot of others are so skeptical about this that it keeps them out of the Kingdom of Christ.

God can be known. But only if he reveals himself to us. Someone has written, “It is the fundamental proposition of the author of Hebrews, as of all the biblical writers, that one cannot know God unless God makes himself known.”¹⁸ Why would this be? It is because God is wholly other than us. In the first place, God is spirit and we are flesh. Beings of flesh come to learn things first through our five senses and then through our brains taking that information and processing it into rational thoughts. But how would something that of itself cannot be touched, seen, heard, smelled, or tasted ever be grasped by a person unless that thing somehow made itself known to our senses?

You know, a lot of [atheists](#) are stubbornly proud of their disbelief in God because they pretend that all that there is in

¹⁸ David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: B & H Publishing Group, 2010), 95.

the universe is stuff that can be ground through the scientific method. In other words, it is all physical stuff. Science deals with physical things, and if you presuppose that all there is in the world is that which science can discern, then God can't exist by definition. You have presupposed him away. This is reason at its absolute worst, and it is living a life of sheer faith, faith that to use Carl Sagan's inspired quote for atheists, "**The Cosmos is all there is, was, or ever will be.**" And if you don't believe this is itself a religion, just go watch his movie Contact and see how he basically worships the idea of extra-terrestrial life.

The problem is, no one actually believes that there is only physical stuff. There are plenty of non-physical things that we all know exist. Surfaces, shapes, isomers, phase changes, numbers, mathematical sets, functions, philosophical relations and properties, thoughts, ideas, things like redness, tennis, justice, and humanity. There are plenty of non-physical things and few are willing to doubt their existence. But things are very different when it comes to God. Why?

The answer, of course, is because **people say things about God that make other people mad.** "**God is holy and you are not.**" "**God is just and you are wicked.**" "**God is perfect and**

you are sinful.” “God will judge all who fall short of his glory.” “The end of this judgment for those who fall short is eternity in hell.” These kinds of claims aren’t made merely by people today, but by the Bible. They are very bad news, and therefore, to avoid having to deal with the claims, it is sometimes just easier to pretend that there is no God and the mean people just like to have power trips over others, so they make up the idea of God in order to rule and lord it over others.

If a person wants to live in a dream world that God can’t exist because only physical things exist, that’s their business I guess, but that doesn’t stop these claims from existing. A truly honest person would want to know what those claims are and whether or not they can be believed. But again, how would you decide?

Hebrews begins by telling us about “long ago and at many times” God spoke in the past. The Greek is actually very beautiful here, and begins what some have called the densest, most theologically packed and beautiful Greek writing in the entire NT. *Polumeros kai polutropos palai*. You hear the alliteration. In the old age, God used to speak in many way and he did so at various times.

Where? In a garden, in an ark, in the land of the Chaldeans, on mountains, in deserts, in the temple, in the tabernacle, in a fiery furnace, in a lion's den, in the divine council; etc. **How?** In visions, in dreams, in a burning bush, in a tempest, in smoke and fire, in written words, in parables, in plain speech, in the Angel of the LORD.¹⁹ Theodoret of Cyr explained long ago, “He appeared to Abraham in one way, to Moses in another, to Elijah in another, to Micaiah in another. Isaiah, Daniel and Ezekiel saw him under different guises. To bring this out the God of all said, ‘It was I who multiplied visions, and took visible form at the hands of the inspired authors’” (Hos 12:1 LXX).²⁰

Notice that Theodoret, taking it from Hebrews, refers to **the prophets**. As Hebrews point out, the revelation of God came almost entirely to the people through the prophets. The Greek is a little ambiguous. The ESV reads, “**by the prophets**.” Certainly God used the prophets to speak to the people (i.e. the Fathers). But it could also mean “**in**” the prophets. This would refer to the more immediately **inspiration**. In fact, throughout Hebrews, almost all of the

¹⁹ Ephrem the Syrian has the strange phrase, “under the diverse guises of an old man, a giant and other characters.” (Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews), in ACCS Hebrews 1:1.

²⁰ Theodoret of Cyr, Interpretation of Hebrews 1.

many quotations from the OT say, “God said,” rather than naming the individual human who wrote them. Biblical inspiration believes holy men were taught by the Holy Spirit. Certainly each human has his own personality that God used. Nevertheless, God was inspiring them each to write what they wrote.

But the point is, God did this through the prophets. They mediated God’s word to the people. They were the intercessors. Were they hearing from the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit? Yes! Many times it is the Angel of the LORD who actually comes and speaks to them (and this in fact is probably the main reason why Hebrews 1-2 is so concerned with angels compared to Christ. We will look at this in detail next week). But the Angel, much less God in another form, rarely came to all of the people or any of the people. Rather, God came to the people through the prophets. So the people had to take the prophet’s word for it. Faith!

But there are all kinds of hucksters out there, and even the true prophets of Israel encountered them. So **how would the people know** if the prophet was from God? Well, God knew this would be a vital question, and so he put laws into

place that helped them out. “The prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that 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 that the LORD has not 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 that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him” (Deut 18:20-22).

Moses was himself the OT prophet among prophets (Deut 34:10). No one else holds a candle to him, not even Elijah or Isaiah. How did the people know that he was speaking on God’s behalf? (Remember, often times they themselves doubted that he was!). The answer is **the signs he performed**, sometimes in fulfillment of a prophecy, other times when he had come from speaking directly to the LORD. God never left his prophets without miracles and signs to back up that his word was true. In these and more ways, then, God spoke to the people long ago or in the earlier age of time. The signs were actually a word from God so that the people would believe that God had sent the prophet.

Now, **some Christians are of the opinion that these**

things continue on today: Modern prophets, signs and wonders, miraculous gifts. My own belief is that God could use these things today if he wanted to, and if he wanted to perform signs or speak in dreams, he could still do that. There have been many claims over the last 2,000 years that God in fact does do these things “in the last days.” There is the famous “Jesus dream” being circulated all over the Muslim world today where Jesus appears to people in their dreams, rescues them from immediate danger, and they become Christians. But what is curious is that the credible stories always have the person being sent to a church or a place where they can hear the preaching of the gospel and through this they are converted.

But it is one thing to say that God *could* do them. It is a very different thing to say, especially as many Pentecostal groups do, that God **MUST** do them ... today. In fact, some of these groups believe that these are God’s normal mode of communication, and go to such an extent that if you do not personally receive “words of knowledge,” speak prophecies, have the sign gift of tongues, or other such things that there is something seriously wrong with your spiritual life. What is strange is that God never did these things ordinarily even

in the OT. Even for the prophets, these things were not every day occurrences. Even for the Apostles they were not. Yet, on their reading of the book of the Acts, these modern Christians come to the conclusion that now, because of Pentecost, these are the normal modes of communication from God for Christians.

How ironic this would all be in light of Hebrews 1:1-2a then if Luke, who wrote Acts, also wrote Hebrews! He says that this is how God *used to do things*. And now, even by 67 A.D., even what was happening in the very earliest church was given way to the ordinary means of communication. And what is that? It is that means of revelation that God gave—through his Son.

People don't like this, but it is vital and essential to talk about it. "Son" is contrasted with "prophets." Now, what is amazing is that Jesus actually was The Prophet. Not even Moses held a candle to Jesus. This is as it was predicted in that same place where the test of a prophet was set up. "I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not listen to my words that he shall speak in my name, I myself will

require it of him” (Deut 18:18-19). Luke knows full well about this passage, because he has Peter quoting it in Acts 3:22-23. He has Jesus as The Prophet Moses predicted.

But the author of Hebrews, if it is Luke, doesn't call Jesus The Prophet. Rather, he calls him the Son. Actually, it is literally “a Son.” Geerhardus Vos says “the” or “his” was “omitted with a purpose, so that the contrast to *in the prophets* is not *in His Son* nor *in the Son*, but rather *in a Son*. In 7:28 we read that the law appoints men high priests, but the word of the oath, which was after the law, appoints a Son. It is a qualitative contrast; *a Son* is contrasted with *men*.”²¹ There is something unique about this Son, and the burden of Hebrews is to tell you about this. The prophets were sent by God, but the Son actually belongs to God. He is the Son of God. He is God.

So the contrast is that in days gone by God spoke to the ancestors of the Jewish people through the prophets and they had to believe that those prophets heard from God. But now God has spoken to you and I through his own Son. This is the thing that sets the ages apart, and it makes all the

²¹ Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. Johannes G. Vos (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1956), 71.

difference in the world. No longer do you have to hear about someone else tell you that he has heard from God. You can read the words from Jesus himself in the Bible and know that the son of God has given you perfect information about God,²² just like the disciples saw Jesus, talked to him, walked with him, touched him, ate with him, saw him die and rise from the dead. You know God through the Son.

This still seems like a foolish thing to many people, however. The people begged Jesus for a sign, even though he had performed tons of them already. “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.’ So he left them and departed” (Matt 16:4). People who clamor and for and demand signs simply won’t be satisfied in Jesus, even though he was the Sign Worker extraordinaire. Because faith in signs never brings fulfillment. Instead, it simply brings a titillation factor and a voyeuristic desire for more.

But even the disciples were uncomfortable with “just Jesus.” Philip said to Jesus, “Show us the Father, and it is

²² I believe this starts to get at Jeremiah 31:31-34’s meaning when it says, “They will all know me.” It is an objective knowing because God is no longer hidden through prophets. Now he has made himself known to all through the Son. We will discuss then more when we come to Hebrews’ use of this OT passage.

enough for us” (John 14:8). Jesus said, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you know believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else believe on account of the works themselves” (John 14:9-11).

You see, friend. The biblical claim is not that Jesus was a nice guy (per modern Liberalism). It is not even that he was a great prophet (per Islam). The Biblical claim is that Jesus is the unique son of God. The biblical claim is that the fullness of deity dwells in him and him alone. The biblical claim is that he is the perfect image of God. The biblical claim is that he is greater than angels, or Moses, or Aaron, or David. The Biblical claim is that Jesus did mighty works to prove his claim, even rising from the dead of his own power in fulfillment of his own words. The Biblical claims is that you know God through Jesus Christ. He is God’s revelation in these last days.

We know God by knowing Jesus Christ. Now, everyone already has knowledge about God, even atheists. And everyone also has a relationship with this God via the law that is written on their hearts that they cannot escape. But in Christ, the relationship of hostility and enmity is turned to friendship and adoption. In Christ, the sins are forgiven, and the righteousness of the Son is imputed. In Christ, the old is taken away and the new comes. In Christ, that which is passing away no longer matters, only that which is forever—namely life in Christ and with his people.

Your satisfaction must not be in the old, beggarly, shadowy things of the prince of darkness. They must not be in the signs and wonders that belong to a by-gone era. Your satisfaction must be in the simple faith that comes to acknowledge with the centurion that day at the cross that this is the Son of God, and he alone is worthy of worship, for he alone is God revealed to you. Faith becomes a major point of this book later on. But it is here, begging you to see it even in the introduction. For he is how God speaks to us today. He is how you come to truly know God as holy, righteous, good, loving, powerful, forgiving, kind, and jealous for his Name and Glory. Believe on the Son of God and you will

know without a shadow of a doubt that God has spoken to you. For it says as much in His word.

Appendix 1: Possible Outlines for Hebrews

| | | | | |
|------------|-----------|-------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| | | Introduction 1:1-3 | | |
| Doctrine 1 | 1:4-14 | □ | Warning 1 | 2:1-4 |
| Doctrine 2 | 2:5-18 | □ | Warning 2 | 3:1-4:16 |
| Doctrine 3 | 5:1-10 | □ | Warning 3 | 5:11-6:20 |
| Doctrine 4 | 7:1-10:18 | □ | Warning 4 | 10:19-39 |
| Doctrine 5 | 11:1-40 | □ | Warning 5 | 12:1-29 |
| | | Final Appeal 13:1-17 | | |
| | | Conclusion 13:18-25 | | |

| HEBREWS | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|
| Focus | Superiority of Christ's Person | | | Superiority of Christ's Work | | | Superiority of the Christian's Walk | | |
| | 1:1 | 4:13 | 4:14 | 10:18 | 10:19 | 13:25 | | | |
| Divisions | Christ over the Prophets | Christ over the Angels | Christ over Moses and Aaron | Christ's Priesthood | Christ's Covenant | Christ's Sanctuary and Sacrifice | Full Assurance of Faith | Endurance of Faith | Exhortation of Love |
| | 1:1 1:3 | 1:4 2:18 | 3:1 4:13 | 4:14 7:28 | 8:1 8:13 | 9:1 10:18 | 10:19 11:40 | 12:1 12:29 | 13:1 13:25 |
| Topics | Majesty of Christ | | | Ministry of Christ | | | Ministers for Christ | | |
| | Doctrine | | | | | | Discipline | | |
| Place | From Rome to Antioch (?) | | | | | | | | |
| Time | 66-67 A.D. (?) | | | | | | | | |
| Author | Luke (?) | | | | | | | | |

Appendix 2: Hebrews in 1 Clement 36

| Hebrews | | 1 Clement | |
|------------------------------------|--|-----------|--|
| Heb 4:15 | "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin." | 1Cl 36:1 | "This is the way, beloved, in which we found our salvation, Jesus Christ, the high priest of our offerings, the defender and helper of our weakness. |
| Heb 12:2 Heb 1:3 Heb 1:4 | Fixing our eyes on Jesus. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. | 1Cl 36:2 | Through him we fix our gaze on the heights of heaven, through him we see the reflection of his faultless and lofty countenance, through him the eyes of our hearts were opened, through him our foolish and darkened understanding blossoms towards the light, through him the Master willed that we should taste the immortal knowledge; "who, being the brightness of his majesty is by so much greater than angels as he hath inherited a more excellent name." |
| Heb 1:7 | Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire." | 1Cl 36:3 | For it is written thus "Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire." |
| Heb 1:5 | For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"? | 1Cl 36:4 | But of his son the Master said thus "Thou art my son: to-day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the ends of the earth for thy possession." |
| Heb 1:13 | And to which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? | 1Cl 36:5 | And again he says to him "Sit thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies a footstool of thy feet." |
| | | 1Cl 36:6 | Who then are the enemies? Those who are wicked and oppose his will." |