

A.B. Simpson:

"Consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus" (Heb. 3: 1).

"God . . . hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son" (Heb. 1:1, 2).

The Epistle to the Hebrews in importance stands side by side with Romans and Corinthians as one of the major messages of the Holy Ghost to the Church after Pentecost. At the same time it has a unique place not only on account of the special people to whom it was addressed, but of the great wealth of Old Testament allusion and illustration which it contains, throwing as it does a flood of light upon the ancient types, and more fully than any other New Testament writing unfolding the intimate connection between the Old and New Testament.

I. AUTHORSHIP

The authorship of this epistle is in doubt. Popularly it bears the name of Paul, but the style and internal evidence are all against his authorship. In any case if he wrote it he must have written it in Hebrew, and some other hand translated it into Greek, thus dropping the peculiarities of his style in the translation. The most probable alternative suggested is that it was written by Apollos, the learned Jew of Alexandria, who was mighty in the Scriptures and who was led into deeper spiritual truth by Aquila and Priscilla, who themselves were disciples of Paul. The uncertainty, however, of the human channel through which it came makes it all the more the message of the Holy Ghost to the people of God. While addressed to the Hebrew Christians it is no less the heritage of the whole Church than the other epistles that were also addressed to particular churches or individuals, but meant for the whole household of faith.

II. PLAN

The plan of the epistle is very simple. Its chief design is to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ and show His superiority to Moses, Joshua, the angels, and all other beings, as the Son of God and the divine Head of redeemed humanity. This is done in three distinct sections representing Christ in various offices and aspects:

1. Christ the Apostle of our profession, or the divine Messenger by whom God hath spoken in these last days to His people (Heb. 1: 1; 4: 13).
2. Christ our Great High Priest (Heb. 4: 14 to 10: 34).
3. Christ the Author and Finisher of our faith (Heb. 10: 35 to 13: 25).

III. CHRIST OUR APOSTLE

The word "apostle" means "one sent, a messenger." The first section of this epistle is devoted to the consideration of Christ as God's last messenger to men.

The opening sentence of this epistle is most impressive, standing out like an inscription cut in stone over the entrance to some majestic building, or, like the frontispiece of some great volume. Three words compose this majestic message, "God hath spoken." "God . . . hath spoken unto us by his Son."

Long and vainly had the world waited for some message from above. Nature had spoken, but her message was too confused and vague to tell us what we needed to know. Written on the glowing skies and the verdant earth the dullest eye could read the two words, "God is." But there the sentence ended with a note of interrogation, and another voice was needed to complete the sentence and write it fully out, "God is Love." Philosophy had sought to penetrate the mysteries of truth and from human intuition and natural reasoning find out the unknown God; but the best that philosophy could find was the dead, cold, abstract trinity of Plato, "The True, the Beautiful, the Good." But this had no power to lift humanity from its wretchedness and sin. Idolatry had spoken, but its gods were monsters of cruelty and corruption, and it had no light or help for hopeless humanity. Sorcery and spiritualism pretended to speak, and they brought some messages from the darkness of the unseen and the future world, but their words were idle and unsatisfying and only ignis fatuus gleams that left us in deeper darkness.

But "God hath spoken." "At sundry times and in diverse manners" He had previously spoken by the prophets, but now "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son." He has given us at length His greatest, fullest, latest word, and it is the living Word Himself, Jesus, who is not only the Messenger of the truth, but Himself

"the way, the truth and the life." The gulf between earth and heaven is spanned. The mystery of the unknown is unsealed. The will of God is revealed, and "God hath spoken." How solemn, how thrilling, how important to know that the Sovereign of the universe has condescended to make Himself known to the inhabitants of this remote and insignificant world, and that we have in this sacred Book and this holy Gospel the word and will of eternal God!

But the weight of the message is infinitely enhanced by the dignity of the Messenger. In a previous Chino-Japanese war an attempt was made two or three times through some subordinate officials of the Chinese government to negotiate a peace. But no attention was paid to the message because of the unimportance of the messenger. But when at last the Chinese government expressed their earnestness and sincerity by sending to Japan their plenipotentiary, their most distinguished citizen, the viceroy himself, the government of Japan treated the matter with due consideration and steps were taken to meet the embassy and arrange an amnesty. And so God has shown His deep sincerity and profound interest in our race and the great question of reconciliation between man and God by sending to us as His Ambassador and Apostle no less a person than His own beloved Son.

The difficulty with the Hebrew people in receiving the Gospel of Christ was their profound veneration for Moses and the prophets, and their unwillingness to admit any other to a place of equal authority, and therefore the author of this epistle takes special pains to prove to them that the Lord Jesus Christ in His own right and by His Father's recognition is superior in dignity and importance to Moses and the prophets.

IV. THE DIGNITY AND GLORY OF THE MESSENGER

1. He is the Son of God. "For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee? and again, I will be to him a Father and He shall be to me a Son?" God's last Messenger to men is His own well-beloved Son. This is finely set forth in the parable of the vineyard (Mat. 21: 33ff). The husbandman sent his servants one by one, but they took them and beat them and killed them. "But last of all he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard, and slew him." Foreknowing all this, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

2. He is the Heir of all things. It is for Him that all things were made and planned. He is the end as well as the beginning of the universe of God. "All things were created by him, and for him." In Him at last shall be summed up all the glory of nature and all the government of the new heaven and earth. "For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell." It is this glorious and dignified Person who has come to us from the heavenly world as the bearer of God's last message to men. He is the Viceroy of the universe and the Viceregent of God Himself.

3. He is the image of God, "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person." This stronger language expresses His equality and unity with God. He is the effulgence and outflow of the Father's glory and the very counterpart of His person. Two persons of equal dignity and glory and yet distinct personality are here described. Therefore all that the Father is He is, and He can truly say, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," for "I am in the Father, and the Father in me." Would you know the character of God, the will of God, the thoughts of God, the plan of God for men, look at Jesus, listen to His words, accept His teachings.

4. He is the Creator of all things. "By whom also he made the worlds"(or more literally, the aeons or ages). He is the Creator therefore, not only of space, but of time; not only of matter, but of all the cycles, dispensations, and ages to come. His wisdom has planned the unfolding stages of God's mighty purpose down to the latest ages of eternity. His hand has formed and poised every circling planet and every central sun amid the constellations, and as you look up into the shining firmament and think of the infinite wisdom and grandeur of God's works and ways turn sweetly to the gentle Presence that is filling all your heart with peace, and say, "This is my Redeemer and my Friend."

5. He is the Sovereign Lord as well as Almighty Creator, "upholding all things by the word of his power." He is the God of Providence as well as nature, controlling all events and circumstances from the fall of a sparrow to the conquest of an empire.

6. He is the mediatorial King. "When he had by himself purged our sins, [He] sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high; being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they."

This is not the same authority referred to in the last paragraph. This is a new kingdom given to Him in consideration of His completed redemption and accomplished atonement. This is the place of ascension glory on the right hand of the Majesty on high where He sits enthroned as King of saints and King of nations, and in a little while to be the Lord of the millennial world.

7. He is greater than the angels. The apostle enters into a very elaborate argument to prove Christ's superiority to all angelic beings. Mighty beings they doubtless are. A single one of them by a touch destroyed an army of one hundred and eighty-five thousand men. A single one sitting on the stone of the sepulcher frightened away the whole Roman guard. But Christ is mightier than all the angels, and they are but His obedient servants, nay the servants of His disciples, "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation."

8. Christ is witnessed to by the Father. "Unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever: a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of thy kingdom. . . . Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundations of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands." This is the language of the Father to the Son. With the deepest reverence the eternal God addresses Jesus Christ as God and Lord, and how can any reverent heart ever doubt again the deity of Jesus? Rather should we in humble fellowship with the Father's testimony bow at His feet and cry, "My Lord and my God."

9. He is witnessed to by the Holy Spirit. "God also bearing witness, both with signs and wonders, and with diverse miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will." The miracles of Christ were all testimonies by His Father and by the Holy Spirit to His divine character. The forces of nature, the powers of hell, the germs of disease, the dread monster death itself, were all subject to His command, and His mighty works give emphasis to His authoritative words and seem to say, "This is my beloved Son, hear ye him."

10. He is the Head of redeemed humanity and Lord of the Millennial Age. "For unto the angels hath he not put into subjection the world to come, whereof we speak. But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honor and didst set him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. . . . But now we see not yet all things put under him. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor." That is, man as a race has not yet attained his lordship over the world, but the Son of man has. We see Jesus exalted as Lord of all, and we know that His people will share the glory which He has achieved. He is already crowned King of the millennial earth, and is only waiting until all the many sons that have been given Him shall be brought unto glory for the final manifestation.

11. He is the Conqueror of death and Satan. By the grace of God He tasted death for every man, and "forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage."

He who speaks to us as our great Apostle has not only come from above and dwelt on earth with man, but He has also penetrated the underworld of death and hell and brought back its spoils, and now can speak with authority as He gives to us eternal life and declares, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." Satan has no power to resist the authority of His Word, and death is spoiled of its awful sway.

12. He is greater than Moses, "For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honor than the house, . . . and Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, . . . but Christ as a son over his own house; whose house are we."

13. He is greater than Joshua, their victorious leader into the Land of Promise, for He, too, is leading them into a better rest, and as the Captain of their salvation bringing many sons unto glory. "For if Joshua had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day. There remaineth therefore a rest unto the people of God. . . . Let us labor therefore to enter into that rest."

14. He is the Living Word (4: 12). Not only is He the Messenger of the truth, but He is Himself the Truth. Therefore He is called by the disciple who was nearest His heart, the Word of God. God has not merely spoken to us in articulate sentences but by a living personality. Like the ancient prince who begged for the freedom of his captive queen, and the conqueror sent him not a written answer to his plea but his very queen herself with

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the message, "This is my word of reply," God has given us Jesus as His highest, sweetest, last Word, and when we receive Him we have within us as part of our very mind, the heart, the will, the thought of God. This mighty Word is here described as living "and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart." Shall we receive Him as God's Word to us? Shall we hear Him say, "Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts"? And shall we follow Him as the Captain of our salvation until He leads us into all the fullness of the Land of Promise, the rest of faith and the will of God?