

CHAPTER 1

THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS

GOD HAS SPOKEN (Hebrews 1:1-4)

by G. H. Lang

GOD, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in *his* Son (Gk., a Son).

This late portion of Holy Scripture begins where the first portion begins, with God. Knowledge of God and of His actings and plans is the basic need of man. Such knowledge slays self-importance, for in the presence of God even the saint says, "I am but dust and ashes . . . I was as a beast before Thee . . . I abhor myself" (Gen. 18:27; Ps. 73:22; Job 42:6). It kills pride of knowledge, for "who can utter the mighty acts of Jehovah" (Ps. 106:2), seeing that "His ways are past tracing out" (Rom. 11:33), that we know but the outskirts of them (Job 26:14), and, as a truly great student of nature said, are but as a child that has found a shell on the shore and the vast ocean remains unexplored? And this knowledge destroys self-sufficiency, for one who had been granted a far deeper insight into the mysteries of God than is usual exclaimed, "who is sufficient for these things? . . . we are not sufficient of ourselves., but our sufficiency is of God" (2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5, 6). Blessed is he whose self-esteem has been annihilated by the knowledge of God.

But though the Writer begins with God he does not go back so far in the workings of God as did Moses. He commences with the fact, necessarily far later than the act of creating the universe, that God has spoken to man. God might have left man to plunge and flounder in ever deeper darkness, the ignorance into which he wandered by rebellion against the light he had. But Love would not suffer this, so God spoke.

Speaking is the method by which God puts forth His energy. Perhaps this results from the fact that His substance is *spirit*, as Christ said: "*spirit* God is"¹ for in the realm of spirit words are energy, and so here in ver. 3, "the *word* of His *power*."

Consequently, "the worlds were framed by the *word* of God" (11:3), "For He *spake*, and it was" (Ps. 33:9). Darkness settled over that original earth: the Light withdrew because of sin. It was by *speaking* that God disturbed that dreadful pall: "God *said*, Let light be, and light was" (Gen. 1:3). The vibration which light is was set in motion by the voice of the Almighty. We are familiar with the power of the human voice to set in motion that amount of vibration which we know as sound. The voice of God started that higher vibration which we know as light.

¹ 1 John 4::24; no article before "spirit"; and comp. 1 John 1:5 "God *light* is" and 4:8 "God *love* is".

It is thus that all direct Divine activities are effected, in the subtler realm of spirit as in that of matter. The angels are “mighty in strength” for they “hearken unto the *voice* of His *word*” (Ps. 103:20), for “the King’s word hath power” (Eccles. 8:4). It is when an honest and good heart receives something that God says that new life starts in the dead spirit of man, for “we are begotten again through the *word* of God, which liveth and abideth” (I Pet. 1:23), being the vehicle of the eternal life of Him who speaks it, even as the Son of God said, “The *words* that I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life” (John 6:63).

It is by *speaking* to us that God imparts knowledge, information, light, for “the opening of *Thy words* giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple” (Ps. 119:130); and His word is also the energizing medium for victorious conflict against sin and Satan, “because ye are strong, and the *word* of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the evil one” (I John 2:14).

Therefore for the Christians addressed in this Epistle, and all to whom it comes, and so to myself, the primary and the final practical question is, Am I of those who tremble at God’s word? (Isa. 66:2). If I am, then to me, though less than the least, and because I know myself this, God will look attentively and compassionately, with even me He will dwell, and will thus grant reviving to the humble and contrite heart (Isa. 57:15). And so shall be healed the backsliding in heart of these believers; so shall be averted the threatening danger of apostasy; and so only shall healing and safety be secured by any one of us. For this is the means of actual daily holiness: “ye are clean because of the *word* which I have spoken unto you” (John 15:3).

God has spoken: let me “make haste and delay not to keep His commandments” (Ps. 119:60).²

God spoke of old, but not to all the world. As far as the record shows, in the long stretch of sixteen centuries before the Flood God spoke only to Adam and Eve, Cain, Noah, and to the world at large through Enoch (Jude 14). Early after the Flood our race abandoned God deliberately and persistently, and in consequence God abandoned them (Rom. 1:21-24, 26, 28) and only rarely addressed them. Abraham was a prophet, as God personally told the heathen king Abimelech (Gen. 20:7). God sent Moses and Aaron to the powerful king of Egypt, also a heathen, and by His dealings with him forced upon all the nations a warning as to Himself the true God. Later all the earth came to

² A word is an audible or visible expression of something inaudible and invisible, that is, a thought. In this sense the Son is a personal revelation of a Person otherwise unseen by man, God the Father, and is called “*the Word*.” But this does not alter the fact stated in ver. 1 and other passages that God also spoke in *words*.

Jerusalem to hear the Divinely given wisdom of Solomon, and at rare intervals God sent messages to Gentiles through Jonah, Jeremiah (ch. 25), Daniel; but in general, through 2000 years the world was left in its self-inflicted darkness.

But to “the fathers” God spake often. The description “fathers” is found at John 7:22; Rom. 9:5 and 15:8, and means the patriarchal ancestors of Israel. But here it means the whole Jewish people, for to them through a thousand years God spake through a succession of prophets from Moses to Malachi, and so to them “were entrusted the oracles of God” (Rom. 3:2).

But thus it was not to every Israelite direct that God spake. In the coming age of Messiah, with all Israel regenerate, and the Spirit of God poured upon all, they shall not need to teach one another to know the Lord, for they shall all know Him (Jer. 31:34): there shall be no prophets. But of old such susceptibility to direct knowledge of God was not found, and God spoke through men whom He chose, fitted, taught, and empowered for this high and perilous task (Acts 7:51-53).

It was not the prophet who originated his message. It was *God* who spake “in” the prophet, *i.e.* first in his mind and then in his speech (For “in” see LXX. Zech. 1:9; 7:12 *bis*). Speech being the use of words to express thought the *words* thus spoken must have been from God; and so in the passage just cited the last but one of the Old Testament messengers spoke of “the *words* which *Jehovah* of hosts had sent by His Spirit by the former prophets.” There is no other explanation of how a prophet could deliver a message which he did not himself fully understand, for of necessity a man comprehends ideas which he himself originates (I Pet. 1:10-12). This renders untenable the theory that God gave to the prophets great general ideas and they struggled to express these as best they could; so that while the ideas were right the expression of them was imperfect. Referring to the whole Old Testament as the “law” the Lord Jesus affirmed that not the smallest particle of any word should fail of fulfillment (Matt. 5:17, 18). Similarly Paul asserted that he spake divine things “not in *words* which man’s wisdom teacheth but which *the Spirit* teacheth” (I Cor. 2:13). These men knew inspiration by God as an experience. It is more reasonable to accept their view of the same than the opinions of moderns who theorize about inspiration but have no experience of it.

Truth has never been communicated by God as one complete body of divinity. There is no Divine scheme of theology for our study. Truth was imparted for immediate practical ends, and therefore as men needed it and as they were able to bear it. Hence the revelation of old was “in many parts and by many methods.” Being thus fragmentary, piecemeal, it was of necessity always incomplete, and required and led on

to further unfoldings. In consequence there was *advance* in revelation. But there was no *evolution* of knowledge or of the true religion. The advance in knowledge of God and His purposes did not come by self-cogitations of the human mind over an original all-inclusive germ of knowledge; it came by successive acts of revelation as God saw fit.

Still less true is the notion that mankind started with a low conception of religion and, by the mental effort of stronger thinkers and moralists, gradually developed nobler conceptions of God. This is abundantly false to secular history and to Holy Scripture. The evidence of the former is in line with the statements of the latter that at the beginning men knew God and lapsed from that knowledge. Rom. 1:18-32, esp. 28, “they did not approve to have (*echein* to hold, keep, retain) God in knowledge.”

Such assertions as that the first conceptions that Israel had of Jehovah were of a base type, as of a tribal god of a barbarous clan, are wholly false. It was “the God of *glory*” who made Himself known to Abram (Acts 7:2), and declared Himself to be El Shaddai, God All-sufficing (Gen. 17:1). Abraham calls Jehovah “the Judge of *all the earth*” (Gen. 18:25), and this is in a part of the Pentateuch which even the documentary theorists ascribe to “J,” their oldest “stratum” in the Pentateuch. It was the self-existing, unchanging, eternal I AM, the covenant-keeping Jehovah, who revealed Himself to Moses (Ex. 3:14, 15), and the descriptions He gave at the first of His character and ways are full of majesty and perfection, nor are they surpassed by later declarations. See, e.g. Ex. 33:19; 34:6, 7. The endeavor to break the force of this fact by bringing the early histories down to a late date and then using them as proof of the alleged evolution of Israel’s religious conceptions, is a palpable and unworthy device, a sheer distorting of history and falsifying of documents.

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