

Text: Heb. 1:1-2a

Title: "Who wrote Hebrews?"

Time: 10/20/2013 pm

Place: NBBC

Intro: My sons and I went to Boston's Museum of Science together last week, and one of the things we enjoyed was an Omni Theatre presentation on the modern day condition of the old city of Jerusalem. It was a fascinating presentation about the four quarters of the old city, the Muslim, the Jewish, the Christian, and the Armenian Christian, and in its description of these cultures and religions, it was clear that the film was designed to express the hope that the walls between them would come down.

The Book of Hebrews was written for the opposite reason. It was written to Hebrew Christians, likely the Jerusalem church, in order to keep the wall between Christianity and Judaism high and strong. The author is clearly concerned about the potential for Hebrew Christians to fall back into Judaism. We find throughout the book the need for persevering faith, and the truth that the superiority of Christ is the key to that perseverance (2:1, 3:13, 4:1, 4:11, 6:1, 10:23, 12:1, 13:13).

Now while the importance, authority, significance, and purpose of the Book of Hebrews are obvious, who exactly wrote the book is not. Our first message is going to address this question, "Who wrote the book of Hebrews?"

I. God speaks in Hebrews through Christ (v. 1, "God").

Ill: I had the wonderful thrill of seeing the Dead Sea Scroll exhibit in Boston's Museum of Science last week. Prior to

this find in 1947, the earliest extant copy of the Hebrew Bible dated to 980 A. D.

This remarkable find of Hebrew scrolls in a series of caves along the shores of the Dead Sea, by Bedouin shepherds, provided a wonderful testament to how carefully our Hebrew Old Testament has been preserved over the centuries under God's gracious providence. The scrolls are over 1000 years older than anything we had previously found, and yet they are the same as our Bibles today with minor and reasonable exceptions.

One author, after noting that this is not the case for most of the works of antiquity, said this of the discovery: "Apart from divine superintendence of the transmission of the Hebrew text, there is no particular reason why the same phenomenon of discrepancy and change would not appear between Hebrew manuscripts produced centuries apart.

"Even though the two copies of Isaiah discovered in Qumran Cave 1 near the Dead Sea in 1947 were a thousand years earlier than the oldest dated manuscript previously known (A.D. 980), they proved to be word for word identical with our standard Hebrew Bible in more than 95 percent of the text. The 5 percent of variation consisted chiefly of obvious slips of the pen and variations in spelling."

The author of the book of Hebrews reminded his readers that God spoke in times past and he still speaks today. Though the past is different from the present, God speaks in both, in part through His providentially preserved Word. Note what the author of Hebrews says about God's speaking in both the past and the present.

1. The past: In times past God's revelation came to the fathers by the prophets in many sections and in many ways.

The many sections refer to the fact that God did not give His Word all at once, but gradually over many ages (cp. KJV translation, "sundry times"). This is what we mean when we use the term *progressive revelation*. Joseph Smith got the *Book of Mormon* all at once, not in many sections progressively.

God's Word also came in many ways: via visions, via dreams, historical records, prophetic symbols, angelic visitations, and via the inspired Scriptures. Once again, Joseph Smith got the *Book of Mormon* one way.

That the Old Testament was written over many centuries by many different authors about the same topic and without contradiction is one of the true miracles of the Word of God and a great evidence of its supernatural inspiration. We need to take the time necessary to read this miraculous book.

2. The present: And then the author tells us that God continues to speak in these last days, and He does so by a Son.

God speaks in the person and work of Jesus Christ, and much of Hebrews is about Jesus Christ. As we study Christ in Hebrews, we hear God speaking to us through Him. He is incomparable, superior to angels, to Moses, to the priests, and to the priesthood and its conventions.

His priesthood is after the order of Melchizedek as our Great High Priest. He is the Author and Finisher of our faith. He is the Son to whom the Father said, "Thy throne O God is forever and ever," and He is the God of Sinai who is

a consuming fire. God speaks in these last days by the full revelation of Christ. Hebrews is a book in which God speaks with the authority of Scripture, because it is a book that reveals Jesus Christ through the inspired NT prophet.

II. The inspired prophet wrote Hebrews (v. 2, “hath in these last days spoken to us by his Son” – this phrase is true of the authors of NT Scripture in a specialized sense).

Note: We have noted the importance of the Son to God’s speaking in the last days to the subject matter of the Book of Hebrews. But it is also true that God spoke to us by the Son through His use of the inspired prophet and the authoring of Scripture.

The church of the last days is founded on the revelation of “all the truth” that the Son directed the Spirit to give the apostles and New Testament prophets (John 16:13-14). It is in this sense that Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone of the church, with the apostles and New Testament prophets being the foundation (Eph. 2:19-20; 3:3-5). Christ sent His Spirit, His Spirit inspired the apostles and prophets, and their inspired writings are what we build our lives and our church on today.

So which inspired prophet did the Spirit use to give us Hebrews? We are not told, we are only given a few clues.

1. He was a man known to his readers (13:18-19, 22-25).
2. He was a disciple of the apostles (2:3-4).
3. He represented others in the authorship of the Epistle (5:11, 6:9, 9:5, 13:18; this was likely a Pauline circle of co-laborers).
4. He wrote with a personal possession of apostolic authority (13:22).

That we do not know which NT prophet wrote Hebrews in no way diminishes the fact that it was written by someone who was one.

III. I believe that Luke wrote Hebrews (13:18-24; 2 Tim. 4:9-11).

1. Luke, though a Gentile, had come to know the Jewish community intimately, including Mary, during the days of Paul's imprisonment in Caesarea, a time when he likely researched the life of Christ for his Gospel of Luke (Acts 21:15-17; 27:1-8).

2. Luke would have been familiar with and concerned about the threat of a return to Judaism in the Jerusalem church, especially in view of the recent execution of the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 15:5, 21:20-21). If Hebrews was written by Luke from Rome (Heb. 13:24) shortly after the execution of Paul (2 Tim. 4:11, Heb. 13:3), it may explain the author's familiarity with the prison status of Timothy (Heb. 13:23). Evidently, Timothy had fulfilled Paul's request to bring the scrolls, parchments, and his cloak to Rome and had then suffered imprisonment himself for a time (2 Tim. 4:9, 13, 21).

3. Luke would have exhorted his fellow believers to be steadfast and faithful, to finish their course as Paul had done (2 Tim. 4:7; Heb. 12:1-2). Protestants have historically faced the same temptation at different times in Church History to return to Romanism.

4. Luke's uniquely highly-educated writing style and vocabulary appears in Hebrews. Some vocabulary unique to Hebrews, the Gospel of Luke, and Acts include the following: *partakers* (μέτοχος; Heb. 1:9, 3:1, 3:14, 6:4, 12:8) in Luke 5:7; *perfection* (τελειώσις; Heb. 7:11) in Luke 1:45; *afar off*

(πόρρωθεν; Heb. 11:13) in Luke 17:12; *lift up* (ἀνορθόω; Heb. 12:12) in Luke 13:13 and Acts 15:16); *feeble* (παραλύω; Heb. 12:12) in Luke 5:18, 24 and Acts 8:7, 9:33; *written* (ἀπογράφω; Heb. 12:23) in Luke 2:1, 3, 5; *considering* (ἀναθεωρῶ; Heb. 13:7) in Acts 17:23.

5. Hebrews is anonymous for a reason. Luke may have left his name off of the Epistle because he was not a Jew, and he did not want his Gentile status to be a hindrance to the book's acceptance among Hebrew Christians.

6. Hebrews utilizes the Septuagint exclusively in its quotations of the Old Testament. Its author was not familiar with the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and was dependent upon Greek. One can imagine that this was the case for Luke.

Application: If I am correct that Luke wrote Hebrews from Rome shortly after the execution of Paul by Nero, we can understand why it is that the book contains such a powerful plea for faithfulness to those who are tempted to turn back to Judaism. Those were days that called for great steadfastness and courage. The book's author understood what it takes to be faithful in times of discouragement and persecution. The superiority of Christ is our reason for faithfulness.

Conclusion: I found a hymn that I think sums up the message of Hebrews in a wonderful way. Unfortunately, it was written by a Seventh Day Adventist, so like the Book of Hebrews, we are going to allow it to remain anonymous. But it contains good scriptural truth about our need to be faithful in light of the superiority of Christ, so I am going to close with it in spite of its deficient origin.

“O brother, be faithful! Soon Jesus will come,
For whom we have waited so long;
O, soon we shall enter our glorious home,
And join in the conqueror’s song.
O brother, be faithful! For why should we prove
Unfaithful to Him who hath shown
Such deep, such unbounded and infinite love –
Who died to redeem us His own.

“O brother, be faithful! The city of gold,
Prepared for the good and the blest,
Is waiting its portals of pearl to unfold,
And welcome thee into thy rest.
Then, brother, prove faithful! Not long shall we stay
In weariness here, and forlorn,
Time’s dark night of sorrow is wearing away,
We haste to the glorious morn.

“O brother, be faithful! He soon will descend,
Creation’s omnipotent King,
While legions of angels His chariot attend,
And palm wreaths of victory bring.
O brother, be faithful! and soon shalt thou hear
Thy Savior pronounce the glad word,
‘Well done, faithful servant; thy title is clear
To enter the joy of thy Lord.’

“O brother, be faithful! Eternity’s years
Shall tell for thy faithfulness now,
When bright smiles of gladness shall scatter thy tears,
A coronet gleam on thy brow.
O brother, be faithful! The promise is sure,
That waits for the faithful and tried;
To reign with the ransomed, immortal and pure,
And ever with Jesus abide.”

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching