

---

# A “Last Days” Revelation: Foundations for a New Covenant Theology Hebrews 1:1-2

*Dr. Dale Evans*

**Introduction** Clearcreek Chapel’s ministries are based upon various Biblical convictions. These are not limited to but include these ideas. Clearcreek Chapel is solidly evangelical. This term has been used with many definitions throughout the history of Christianity, but this morning we are using it to label two ideas. The first is that Clearcreek Chapel firmly upholds the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures. We are “Bible” people. The Scriptures are read, studied and taught with importance and intensity. The second, its corollary is that we believe what it says, in particular the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ as our hope for eternity. Clearcreek Chapel holds strongly to the conviction of God’s position as supreme over His creation, in that He sovereignly planned, designed, orders, guides and governs this world to His own planned end and goal. To worship a lesser God would leave us ultimately to struggle and doubt as to the certainty of our hope. Clearcreek Chapel, because of its conviction of the authority of the Bible for all of life, vigorously applies its teaching to each and every circumstance of life for decision-making and counsel. The counseling ministry, in its formal and informal expressions here, would not exist if it were not affirmed that the Bible is authoritative for all of life. Clearcreek Chapel, in its affirmation of God’s declaration of His character and will in the Holy Scriptures, then must also affirm a strategy of understanding the various expressions, narratives, literary styles that compose this glorious revelation. Here at Clearcreek Chapel one interpretive strategy that affects how the Bible is read and applies is referred to as “New Covenant Theology.” In this series it is hoped that this approach will be clearly presented, not exhaustively, but in an attempt to provide a definition and declare of few of the foundational premises that show how even this approach is derived from the Scriptures themselves.

The Book of Hebrews, although neglected in many churches serves an important place in the understanding of the Bible at Clearcreek Chapel. Pastor Russ Kennedy has worked through the book from the pulpit twice now in his tenure as Pastor for Teaching and Worship here at The Chapel. Carey Danielson, while he was still here as a bi-vocational elder taught through the book in the Adult Bible Education hour. Numerous passages have been presented from the pulpit as foundational and illustrative of many ministry concepts functioning here at the Chapel. In short, many of you are likely to at least unconsciously yawn at yet another presentation from this New Testament document. And yet here we return, not because it was not presented correctly previously, but because this example of a first century sermon, albeit a divinely inspired sermon, has much to teach us. The anonymous author of this document, intended to be read aloud as an encouragement to an audience of believers who because of persecution has some in their midst doubting the validity and foundations

of their faith, in a grand discourse affirms the scope and particulars of the Christian faith and establishes their (and our) hope in the certainty of God's plan.

Hebrews 1:1,2 is a contrasting set of parallels that establishes the context of the remainder of the argument of the book, and as asserted here at Clearcreek Chapel the entire Bible. The author, without delay, grabs our attention with both continuity and discontinuity with this era of God's plan. He announces that the Gospel program is both continuous with God's work previous and yet at the same time is understood as bringing things to "the end." He asserts that the intrusion of the Son, his person and work in the message and power known as the Gospel, is the summation of God's plan. He, in the same manner recorded by the apostle John in the Revelation, sees the Christ as alpha and omega, beginning and end. In other words, he presents the Son as the purpose and goal of the divine program. Our author uses this phrase to express this idea: "whom he appointed the heir of all things (the end goal of all things, the omega), through whom also he created the world (the source or beginning, not an afterthought, the alpha)." This sermon, from a closer look at these verses introducing the Book of Hebrews, will show that New Covenant Theology has as one of its foundations the newness of a "last days revelation."

### I. "Long ago" vs. "in these last days"

We are reading these verses much as we did in Adult Bible Education a few weeks ago in that we are seeing the parallel in the two verses set apart by the contrasting conjunction "but" in verse two. The first contrasting parallel we will examine is the distinction made in a time frame: that is "long ago" versus "in these last days."

As the author of Hebrews embarks on his exhortation he wants his hearers to think back and reflect upon the past. He wants them to consider a past age of God's dealings with humanity. Believing Jews would have indeed felt a true dichotomy in their religious life since the exile and return. At the time of Christ's appearance it had been 400 years since the last affirmed prophetic utterance, and much was wrong with the temple worship. Not the least was the obvious lack of God's visible presence as was true in the past. Many would have felt this ambivalence over their religious practice, knowing that there should be much more, some more sure word, a better King and covenant than that it appeared to them at the present.

When we studied the Chronicles a few years ago in Adult Bible Education we pointed out the forward-looking nature of the document. The books of the Chronicles end the Hebrew Bible and are arranged in a large parallel, chiastic structure with the center found in II Chronicles 6:3-11 in Solomon's dedicatory speech. Let us turn back there and read this speech. [Read II Chron. 6:1-11] But by the time we finish the book we find Jerusalem conquered and burned. Turn further to II Chronicles 36 and verse 17. [Read II Chronicles 36:17-21] But that is not where the Hebrew Bible ends, let's read on through verse 23. Indeed a house of his people will be built, no doubt to completely fulfill chapter 6. Combine this with the rest of the prophetic material and many were waiting, much like Simeon in the temple, to "see your salvation...prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."

But we contrast this to "these last days." Note the author does not say as we approach the last days or in anticipation of the last days. No, he has "in these" last

days. He considered the era that he and his hearers were in, was indeed the “last days.” We know that we still await a consummation but the last days era has been inaugurated with the coming of the Messiah and is moving forward to now include us in its unfolding.

## **II. “God spoke to our fathers” vs. “he has spoken to us”**

Which brings us to parallel contrast number two: that includes the core of the sentence, “God spoke to our fathers” versus “he has spoken to us.” Indeed the author is highlighting the fact of God’s revealing activity. We have not been left to our own devices to understand and approach God. He has indeed “spoken” in the past to those referred to as our fathers, by this I think Abraham, Moses, David and the like. And lest we feel slighted in this era known as “last days” he has spoken to us as well.

God speaking is an important concept for our author. Indeed for him God’s speech is found embodied in the words of Scripture. He introduces Old Testament quotes frequently as “God says” or “said.” Just look down to verse 5 for an example. In our reading of this book, when we get to 4:12 the author asserts its “living and active” qualities and then in 12:25 he issues a warning not to refuse him who is speaking. Let’s quickly turn back to there and read it in its context. [Read Hebrews 12:18-29]

## **III. “by the prophets” vs. “by his Son”**

This brings us to our third contrasting parallel, that of the instrument of God’s revelation. Long ago, to our fathers God spoke by “the prophets.” We could limit this to mean the portion of the Hebrew Bible known as the “Prophets.” The Bible’s witness to itself often refers to “the Law and the Prophets” or more completely as in Luke 24:44 “The Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms.” Or we could take this as a reference to the individuals through whom God gave his testimony that includes all of the Old Testament Scriptures. This is probably the extent of our reference.

He contrasts this however to God’s speaking through “his Son.” Translators have a bit of trouble putting this in English. Most say something like our ESV “his Son.” Some express it as “the Son.” But the literal expression is “in Son.” This probably is to take our focus off of the individual and more on the character of who he is. We know he is referring to Jesus of Nazareth but the author waits until 2:9 to explicitly name him. Here he is wanting us to think of the quality of sonship as that which qualifies Him to be the mouthpiece for God in these last days. It is not just the very words of the person Jesus that he is referring to but all that he is in revealing the plan and purpose of the Father.

## **IV. “at many times and many ways” vs.**

Let’s move on to our last contrast, that of “at many times and many ways” with...nothing. Those who are participating in the Adult Bible Education class on Interpreting the Bible will have been attuned to recognize this absence from the pattern. This should alert us to some significance. Yes it could merely be a stylistic structure, but most feel that the art of the author of Hebrews is too advanced to not have some significance to this omission. In fact, seeing this as a rhetorical point will affect how we read the first phrase. I know in the past myself and actually many Bi-

ble teachers and commentators see this as principally referring to the fragmented and chronological nature of progressive revelation. It would essentially cause us to think thus: God spoke to Adam in the garden, he spoke to Noah directly to build the ark, he spoke to Abraham in dreams and as a man, he spoke to Moses from a bush on a mountain, he spoke to Isaiah and Daniel in visions and so on. Let me give you an extended quote from a contemporary popular commentator/preacher to illustrate this point.

“Now notice how God spoke: ‘in many portions and in many ways.’ The writer uses a play on word in the original language: ‘God polumeros and polutropos...’ the two Greek words are interesting. The mean respectively: ‘in many portions (as of books) and ‘in many different manners.’ There are many books in the Old Testament - thirty nine of them. In all those many portions and in many ways God spoke to men... Sometimes it was in a vision, sometimes by a parable, sometimes through a type or a symbol. There were many different ways in which God spoke in the Old Testament....May ways include may literary ways. Some of the Old Testament is narrative. Some of it is poetry, in beautiful Hebrew meter. The many ways also includes may types of content. Some is law, some is prophecy, some is doctrinal, some is ethical and moral, some is warning some is encouragement and so on...Yet beautiful and important an authoritative as it is, the Old Testament is fragmentary and incomplete. It was delivered over the course of some 1500 years by some forty-plus writers—in many different pieces, each with its own truths. It began to build and grow, truth upon truth. It was what we call progressive revelation...The revelation did not build from error to truth but from incomplete truth to more complete truth and it remained incomplete until the New Testament was finished...The Old Testament had been given in pieces. 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 come before Him, to Jonah, His resurrection was typified. Every one of those pieces of revelation was true and accurate, and each one related to the other in some way or another. And each one in some way or another pointed to the Messiah, the Christ . But only in Jesus Christ Himself was everything brought together and made whole. In Him the revelation I was full and complete.”

Now this is correct as it goes, nothing wrong was said but by not seeing the contrast the main point was missed. The “before” revelation characterized by the phrase “at many times and in many ways” has been radically contrasted by that which is the one. If you see this as reference to the former ages and covenants we see the New as being now come. What was true previously however was incomplete and has now been brought to completeness in this “last days” speaking in, by and through the Son. The Puritan, John Owen says this “in opposition to this gradual revelation, the Apostle intimates that now, by Jesus the Messiah, God had at once begun and finished the revelation of His will, according to their own hopes and expectations...the Apostle intimates that the revelation of God and His will by Christ was accomplished in one way only, and in one manner only, namely, by His preaching the gospel, who was anointed by the Spirit without measure.” We begin the book of Hebrews’ great discussion of the plan of salvation and redemption by announcing that the New Covenant “in His blood” is anchored in his new and completed revelation.

As we finish, notice this. It is not merely that Christ has fulfilled the Old Covenant's message; that is indeed true. But it is that God has "spoken" to us in this Son. Do not miss this radical discontinuity in the Covenants. God has revealed Himself afresh, not disregarding the Old but in giving the Old its proper understanding and message.

---

## **Conclusion**

So what does that mean for us? Next week we will see how this thinking affects our reading of the entire Bible, and later in the year, near Reformation Sunday we will plan to introduce you to another figure in history who struggled with just this same issue with those in the evangelical camp in the mid 1500's and who seemed to get it right but was not nearly given the due he justly deserved.

1. Do not disregard the message of God in the prophets! We must read, digest and learn much from what we know as the Old Testament.
2. We must read the Old Testament in light of the New Testament. We must be always engaged in a "Christian" reading of the Old Testament.
3. Lastly, let us continue to be mindful of our place in redemptive history. Let us be both sober and excited about continue to express our faith and hope in "these last days!"

