

Buzz King
buzz@BuzzKing.com
BuzzKing.com
303 437 7419

Hebrews, 1:1-4, New Revised Standard Version, ue.

*1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets,
2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. 3 He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*

He also created the worlds.

Hebrews is an unusual New Testament book. It has a very large vocabulary and eloquent Greek, and it quotes the Old Testament more extensively than any other New Testament book. The writing and the content of Hebrews would have struck an ancient reader as elevated. The book would have felt both imposing and compelling, the words perhaps of a prophet. Hebrews is all about Jesus. Hebrews draws a sense of continuity between the promises of the God of the Old Testament and the identity of Jesus, the works of Jesus, and the promise of eternal life with God through Jesus. We have no idea who wrote Hebrews. Even shortly after the letter was written, the identity of its author was lost. Those who wanted it included in the New Testament canon argued that Paul had written it – but the writing in Hebrews is nothing like Paul's. We also do not know to whom the letter was

written. It feels very much like a sermon, but one written in the style of an Old Testament rabbi. It's called Hebrews only because of its extensive references to Old Testament stories. So, we take it simply as an anonymous first century letter written to early Christians who desperately needed encouragement. The letter is a call to worship. It energizes the reader to rise and offer their minds, their hearts, and their souls to their Savior, and at the same time cast aside any concerns of the world. Consider the first four verses – which form a powerful introduction. It has a literary flourish somewhat similar to the opening of the Gospel of John.

1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, ² but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. ³ He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

This introduction tells us what the Book of Hebrews is all about. This passage describes how God in the past communicated through the Prophets. That communication, the revelations of the Hebrew Scriptures, came a little at a time, slowly, over many centuries, through many human voices that spoke for God. The author is underlining a powerful sense of contrast, making us focus on the sudden impact that Jesus had on the world, compared to the painstaking spiritual progress brought to the world through the ancient prophets. Those old revelations were

good, but in very recent times a new, powerful voice has arisen. God has spoken through the Son, and through the Son, he also created the worlds. We note that the prophets spoke for God, but they did not create the universe around us. Indeed, Jesus is no ordinary prophet. He is the reflection of God's glory, the very imprint of God himself. Final revelation has now come, through the Son, and Jesus has brought us salvation. Jesus is now with God. To remind us that Jesus was no mere human prophet, we are told that he was far superior even to the angels.

There is a subtlety in this passage that is not obvious to the modern reader. We can appreciate the sudden, almost cataclysmic impact that Jesus' revelations had on the spiritual lives of the People of God. And yes, Jesus was not about incremental progress, a long trickle of revelation. The Old Covenant was *War and Peace*, long and tangled, with so many characters we can't possibly keep track of them, and so many story lines that the common story thread can be hard to find. The New Covenant is the shortest of short stories, and an explosive one that blows us away with its immediacy, its drama, its focus, and its impact. But consider the ancient reader. Early followers of Christ were the first to be exposed to the New Covenant. They were still being convinced that Jesus was no mere human prophet, and being told that he was superior to even the angels – heavenly beings - was an important fact of which to be reminded. For us, this introduction is an emotional

overview of what we know to be true. To the first-generation believer, this introduction is an important lesson still being grasped by those who are accepting Jesus as the Messiah.

But here is something that we as modern believers have forgotten. The earliest followers of Christ needed to be convinced that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah – but once they did come to embrace this astonishing news, they thought that Jesus would come a second time very soon. They thought the End Times would come perhaps during their own lifetimes. We see this in Paul’s first letter to the believers in Corinth. I have abbreviated this from Chapter 7:

²⁹ brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, ³¹ and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

The gospel of Matthew, in Chapter 24, puts these words in the mouth of Jesus, and again, I have shortened them:

³⁶ “But about that day and hour no one knows, neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. ⁴⁰ Then two will be in the field; one will be taken, and one will be left. ⁴¹ Two women will be grinding meal together; one will be taken, and one will be left. ⁴² Keep awake, therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. ⁴³ But understand this: if the owner of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into. ⁴⁴ Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

The ancient Christians, since they had just been given the promise of Jesus returning someday and all of time coming to an end, could easily believe that it could happen in their lifetimes. But two thousand years have gone by, and we no longer live with this sense of immediacy. Notice, though, that we are not told in 1 Corinthians or in the Gospel of Matthew that the world will end in a handful of years. Paul says: *“For the present form of this world is passing away.”* In the Gospel of Matthew, we are told: *“But about that day and hour no one knows.”* And *“you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”* The focus in the Bible isn’t that the end will come soon, it’s that it will come quickly, so quickly that we will be caught off guard if we are not constantly aware. We must stay awake and always be waiting for the thief to break in.

I don’t believe that this means we should be paranoid that we’ll suddenly die before we have properly served the Lord or served God’s people. Rather, since God wants us to live in joy and confidence, feeling the Holy Spirit within us every day, I think this warning about the Son of Man coming at an hour we do not expect means that we should push aside whatever holds us back from a fully radiant life of faith. The early believers needed to be reminded that Jesus wasn’t simply the next in a long series of prophets: he is God. We today need to be reminded that although two thousand years have gone by since Jesus walked this

earth, since a new age of revelation emerged, God wanted us to practice two thousand years of active, in-your-face faith. But it's easy for us to become complacent, to see Christianity as moving slowly. We tend to forget about our faith for a good while and pay attention only to this world. Maintaining our faith each Sunday morning for an hour seems like all the attention it needs.

The first 11 chapters of Paul's letter to the church in Rome – which he had not yet visited – are devoted to theological issues. But in Chapter 12, Paul shifts to the practical. He begins to address the individual, telling each of us about our responsibilities as believers. Starting in verse 9, he says:

⁹Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. ¹⁰Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹²Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.

You can feel the excitement in his words. Don't just passively love all people because as a Christian you are supposed to: make it a real and powerful love. Don't just live a decent life: vehemently reject evil and grab on tightly to what you know is godly. See just how honorable a life you can live. Show zeal, be fervent. Pray at all times. This is the way that first century believers lived. It was easy for them. The Messiah had just appeared on Earth, ending that long, long Old Covenant period of revelation. But we have indeed become slothful in our zeal.

Here are some suggestions on how to be a zealous believer today. 1) Live in a visibly positive way and let others feel your gentle presence. Go to bed each night knowing that when you had a chance that day, you gave a stranger who seemed stressed a smile, and you genuinely wished them the best. People can tell when you're just saying it because we say it, and when you truly mean for another person to prosper. Show your excitement about being alive today, being a believer today, walking in the footsteps of a savior who has placed the Holy Spirit within you. Exude something that others will want to have. That's how you spread the faith. That's how you take what you have and multiply it. But when you are with people who are under pressure, perhaps at work or with someone who is sick or having family or financial problems, be relaxed and attentive. Be a listener, not a talker. Be a person who has a calming, caring influence on others. Let people who are in need see you as someone to be around when they are having trouble dealing with whatever life is throwing at them.

2) Be a servant of God and of all those made in the image of God every day. Rather than just being friendly, serve. Be creative and see what tangible things you can do to help others. If you have a neighbor with whom you've had a tense relationship over a tree that overhangs your yard and dumps crabapples, or if they have barking dogs, tell that person you understand they love their tree or

their dogs - and you don't mind the disruption. If you know someone in need, help them out. You can anonymously leave a couple bags of groceries on the porch of someone who is struggling financially. There are many organizations that are constantly looking for volunteers. You could drive elderly people who cannot drive to their medical appointments.

3) Live with thanks instead of living with desire and regret. Don't wish that you had more. Don't wish that you had done things differently and thereby ended up with more money, a bigger house, a more impressive job. Lift your mind up to God and tell God that you deeply appreciate the gifts that you have been given on that day and on all the previous days of your life.

And 4) Dedicate what you do to God, not to yourself. Rather than trying to impress others or make yourself feel successful, see what you can offer God. Even a very average day that seems no different than the day before it, if you think about making that day a gift to God, you will find yourself living in faith and making it feel easy to do so. Dedicating a day to God comes hand in hand with connecting with God that day. You can set a timer on your phone to remind you to pause, find a quiet place, and pray, perhaps once an hour. If that conflicts with your daily schedule, then rather than living with the stress of trying to squeeze prayers into your day, simply connect with God less frequently. Prayer should be

a peaceful, calming experience where you tell God that your life, and this day specifically, are his, not yours. At the end of the day, don't remember that you haven't stopped yet to talk to God. Instead tell yourself that even though you've been praying all day, you're going to do it again tonight, with enthusiasm.

Remember this from our passage today: *1 Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds.* Every day that you live, you have an opportunity to do something that the ancients couldn't do. Only a tiny fraction of them ever met a real prophet. And those prophets weren't God. They weren't even angels. But you have a prophet of your own, someone you know, someone who planted the Holy Spirit within you. That prophet, Jesus, is God. Grab every day of your life and squeeze goodness out of it. Offer every conscious minute of your life to the Son of God and to all those made in God's image. If you find yourself bored at times, then you have an amazing opportunity to take that hole in your life and let God fill it with grace. If you are a busy person, and you don't seem to have free time at all, then remember that whatever time you use for any purpose is a gift from God - and you cannot guard it selfishly. Be excited about having faith. And remember that your savior prophet also created the worlds.

Please pray with me.

God, we thank you for bringing us into a world that is filled with revelation. Thank you for giving us the gift of Jesus, a gift of his teachings, his example of living with peace and love for all people, and his promise of an eternal life. Guide us and do not let us forget the incredible significance of that gift. May we make use of it every day, many times a day. Amen.