

Thought for Sunday 25th April 2021

Pastor Gordon Hamilton

Hebrews 1:1-14

We are fairly certain who wrote most of the books and letters that make up the New Testament but the book or letter to the Hebrews we are less certain of the author. Some people believe it could be Paul, although Paul's letters are normally signed, or begin with the words Paul, or Paul and someone else. We do believe that Paul had a scribe who wrote his letters and in his first letter to the Corinthians he writes 16:21; *'I, Paul, write this in my own hand.'* And I am told that in the original letter, this end part of the letter is written in larger lettering, as if to assure people that these were Paul's words. A bit like people who get their secretary to type letters on their behalf and then they sign it to say these are their own words. It is possible that the letter to the Hebrews was written by Paul's scribe, possibly after Paul's death, maybe the scribe wanting to pass on what he had learned from Paul. Whoever wrote it, the words of Paul to Timothy ring true, 2 Timothy 3:16; *'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness.'* What is certain, is that whoever wrote the letter to the Hebrews, knew their scriptures, because from verse 5 through to verse 13, although they haven't said where they came from, the writer quotes seven Old Testament passages. What the writer did say, was that Jesus, God's son, *'had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.'* And then goes on to use scripture to prove that Jesus wasn't an angel, and we have talked about angelic visions that were involved in Old Testament prophets births, but that this Jesus was the promised Messiah. Over the past few weeks we have read of angelic visitations, but the writer here says; *'to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son...'* what the writer is trying to get us to realise, just in case we are not certain, is that Jesus is no angelic being, Jesus is the Son of God, the Messiah, totally human yet totally divine. At the beginning of the chapter the writer wants us to know for certain that God had spoken to his people before. To our forefathers, through the prophets at many times and in various ways. A few weeks ago we read that God spoke to Abraham, giving the promise of a son, even in Abraham and Sarah's old age. Then two weeks ago we looked at Manoah's wife, the promise of a son, even though she was barren and childless. We also looked, two weeks ago at the angel Gabriel who was sent with a message to Zechariah with the promise of a child to his wife, Elizabeth, who even in old age would have a child, and then to turn things upside down, the promise of a son to a virgin, Mary, this was no ordinary son, this was the Son of God. The writer recognises that this Son, spoke to humans in a man to man, or man to woman way without angelic help. I love the way the gospel of John tells it in 1:1-5; *'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.'* And it is as if the writer to the Hebrews is echoing those words but saying it slightly differently, there is a sense of awe around this whole passage. The writers want to get the message across and will say it in as many different ways, if that is what it takes to get people, maybe the Jews in particular, to believe that the promised Messiah has come to this earth. Sadly, of course, there are many who are still struggling to come to terms with that fact, and many who just cannot believe it to be true. The writer again and again quotes Old Testament scripture, and in modern day translations of our bibles, we can see at the bottom of the page where the references come from. Psalm 2:7 is quoted in verse 5, as is 2 Samuel 7:14

and 1 Chronicles 17:13. Verse 6 quotes from Deuteronomy 32:43 and also says ‘see Dead sea scrolls and Septuagint. Verse 7 quotes Psalm 104:4, verse 9 quotes Psalm 45:6 & 7, verse 12, Psalm 102:25-27 and verse 13, Psalm 110:1. The Old Testament wasn’t split into chapter and verse when the book or letter to the Hebrews was written. If you want to check these references are correct, then it is a good bit of homework. Knowing God’s Word is important, knowing chapter and verse is not so important. I am sure you may know more scriptures than you think you do know, and learning a verse a week is not a bad idea. I am sure that there are times when we sing a hymn we can recognise a portion of scripture in it, although we may not be able to quote the chapter and verse. Hebrews 1 closes with the words; ‘*Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?*’ Of course there are stories like The Angels of Mons, a popular legend about a group of angels who supposedly protected members of the British Army in the Battle of Mons at the outset of the First World War. On 22nd-23rd August 1914, the first major engagement of the British Expeditionary Force in the First World War occurred at the Battle of Mons. I have heard many tales of Angels during the First and Second World Wars. We cannot prove, or disprove any of them, but then we cannot prove Jesus is the Son of God, that is why the Christian faith is just that, FAITH. I can echo the words of Job 19:25; ‘*I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth.*’ I hope you can. Amen.

Rejoice, the Lord is King!
Your Lord and King adore;
Mortals, give thanks, and sing,
And triumph ever more:
Lift up your heart, lift up your voice;
Rejoice! Again I say: rejoice!

Jesus the Saviour reigns,
The God of truth and love;
When He had purged our stains,
He took His seat above:

His kingdom cannot fail,
He rules o’er earth and heaven;
The keys of death and hell
Are to our Jesus given:

He sits at God’s right hand
Till all His foes submit,
And bow to His command,
And fall beneath His feet:

Rejoice in glorious hope;
Jesus the Judge shall come,
And take His servants up
To their eternal home: