

Series: The Superiority of Christ
Title: Introduction
Hebrews 1:1

Introduction

Today we will begin a series of messages on the Superiority of Christ from the Book of Hebrews. Most Bibles call the Book of Hebrews an “epistle” or “letter,” but it is really more like a theological essay than a personal letter. For one thing, it doesn’t begin like most of the New Testament letters. They start with the author identifying himself. The writer of Hebrews starts right in developing his case.

We don’t know who the author is. Many scholars think he was probably connected to the Apostle Paul somehow. We also don’t know the author’s audience. As you read through the book, you catch glimpses of the audience but nothing specific.

We know they were ethnically Jewish, which is evident from the title “Hebrews.” We also know they were people who professed Jesus as their promised Messiah but were being tempted to abandon Jesus and return to Judaism. Why would they do that? For one thing, they were being persecuted.

Rome recognized Judaism as a legitimate religion. And in the early years of the Christian movement, the Jewish Christians enjoyed the protection of Rome because Rome viewed them as a sect of Judaism. As time continued, the Christian movement came to be viewed as its own religion—and both Rome and Judaism persecuted them for different reasons. The temptation to go back to Judaism and live under the legal protection of Rome was quite compelling.

Old Testament Judaism had biblical history on its side, which only made the temptation worse. After all, God inspired the Old Testament and instituted the Old Testament system of worship with its temple, priests, and sacrifices. So how could it be wrong to return to a way of worshipping that God had ordained? And it would certainly make their lives easier.

But the author of Hebrews argues that this is not a legitimate option. He argues that because Jesus is God’s Messiah, he is better than Old Testament Judaism. He uses the word “better” 13 times in his book. He explains that Jesus is better than the Old Testament prophets, the angels, Moses, the tabernacle, the Levitical priesthood, the animal sacrifices, and the Old Testament Covenant. Jesus institutes a better covenant. – a way of building an eternal relationship with God.

The writer of Hebrews argues that Jesus fulfilled the purpose of Old Testament Judaism and established a new way to worship God. To go back to Judaism would be to reject Jesus as God’s Messiah. Instead of returning to Judaism, the Hebrews writer says believers should move forward believing in Jesus even if that means persecution.

It makes the Book of Hebrews extremely relevant to us for many reasons. First of all, it teaches us that true Christianity emphasizes a relationship with God instead of religious ritual observance. The Old Testament system, its holy buildings, priestly, liturgical services, the religious holy days and seasons were but pictures foreshadowing the coming of God's Messiah and his death on the cross.

Now that Jesus has come and fulfilled these pictures, we can relate personally to God instead of through the images of Old Testament Judaism. Pictures are excellent reminders of the past, but they're poor substitutes for an actual relationship. Authentic Christianity is not defined by religious buildings, priests, liturgical services, or holy days and seasons. – that's religion!

Genuine Christianity is concerned with developing a relationship with God. The real message of Christianity is a radical message that through Jesus, we can know God personally and experience his unconditional love and acceptance. Let's look at how Israel viewed prophets, priests, and kings and then how New Testament believers saw them.

There were three significant offices important to Israel in the Old Testament: the prophet, the priest, and the King. Each of these offices was distinct from the others.

The prophet spoke God's words to the people.
The priest offered sacrifices, prayers, and praises to God on behalf of the people.
The King ruled over the people as God's representative.

But these offices only foreshadowed the work of Christ.

- As Prophet - Jesus reveals God to us and speaks God's words to us.
- As Priest - Jesus offers a sacrifice to God on our behalf and is himself the sacrifice offered.
- As King - He rules over the universe, but He also rules over the church.

God appointed the prophets, priests, and kings to occupy these offices in the Old Testament. And with God's divine blessing, they became the *mediators* between God and man. A mediator is a *go-between*. He stands between two or more persons or groups in a dispute and tries to reconcile them.

The Bible describes humans as being at enmity against God. We have rebelled, revolted, and refused to obey God's rules. As a result, God's wrath is upon us. To be reconciled to God, we must avoid the catastrophic situation of having to face His wrath. Our reconciliation is only possible because God sent Jesus to be our Mediator.

According to scripture, Jesus is the Mediator of the New Covenant, just as Moses was the mediator of the Old Covenant of the Law. Moses was God's go-between in the Old Testament when he gave the Israelites the Law. But the Law could not accomplish ultimate reconciliation.

Separate individuals held the offices of prophet, priest, and King in the Old Testament, but in the New Testament, all three offices are held supremely by one person – Jesus Christ. Through His life and ministry, Jesus fulfilled the messianic prophecy of Psalm 110. Jesus is the one who is both David’s descendant and David’s Lord. He is the priest who is also the King. He is the Lamb who is slain and yet is the Lion of Judah.

Christ perfectly fulfills all three offices.

I. Jesus as Prophet

The Old Testament prophets spoke God’s words to the people. Moses was the first major prophet, and he wrote the first five books of the Bible. Following Moses, other prophets spoke and wrote God’s words.

Matthew 21:9 records the triumphal entry of Jesus, “Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: “Hosanna to the Son of David! ‘BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!’ Hosanna in the highest!” And when He had come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, “Who is this?” So the multitudes said, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth of Galilee.” (Matthew 21: 9-11 NKJV)

Even Moses predicted the Messiah would be a prophet in Deuteronomy 18:15-18, “The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of the LORD your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, ‘Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, nor let me see this great fire anymore, lest I die.’ “And the LORD said to me: ‘What they have spoken is good. I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him.” (Deuteronomy 18: 15-18 NKJV)

In Acts 3:22-26, Paul says that Moses was speaking about Christ. He writes, “For Moses truly said to the fathers, ‘THE LORD YOUR GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN. HIM YOU SHALL HEAR IN ALL THINGS, WHATEVER HE SAYS TO YOU. AND IT SHALL BE THAT EVERY SOUL WHO WILL NOT HEAR THAT PROPHET SHALL BE UTTERLY DESTROYED FROM AMONG THE PEOPLE.’ Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days. You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.’ To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one *of you* from your iniquities.” (Acts 3:22-26 NKJV)

The duty of the Old Testament prophet was to reveal God and speak His words to the people. But according to the gospel of John Chapter 1, Jesus *is* the Word! When the people observed Jesus, they were seeing God in the flesh.

In John 14:9-11, "Jesus asks Phillip, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own *authority*; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I *am* in the Father and the Father in Me, or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves. Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also; and greater *works* than these he will do, because I go to My Father. And whatever you ask in My name, that I will do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in My name, I will do *it*. (John 14:9-14 NKJV)

Three things distinguish Jesus as a great Prophet.

- **His Anointing**—the Holy Spirit anointed Jesus at His baptism. The Old Testament prophets were anointed with oil when commissioned for service.
- **His Proclamations**—Jesus often used the same *announcements* the Old Testament prophets used.
- **His Prophetic Messages**—Like the Old Testament prophets, Jesus made prophetic predictions. He foretold the destruction of Jerusalem in Matthew 24, and He based his first sermon in Luke Chapter 14 on a prophetic text in Isaiah 61 and then stated, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:18-21)

Most of Jesus' prophetic teachings focused on the coming Kingdom of God. John the Baptist emphasized that same theme at the beginning of his ministry. According to the Apostle Peter, Jesus is our example, and it is our responsibility to proclaim God's message to the whole world (1 Peter 2:21).

How long has it been since you shared your faith with someone? As we speak God's word to people, the Spirit of Christ within us anoints our lips with God's message. In this way, we become modern-day prophets. Our mission to proclaim God's message to this generation becomes fruitful through Christ's words and anointing.

In Luke 4, Jesus quotes Isaiah 61, "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE HAS ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR; HE HAS SENT ME TO HEAL THE BROKENHEARTED, TO PROCLAIM LIBERTY TO THE CAPTIVES AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO THE BLIND, TO SET AT LIBERTY THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED; TO PROCLAIM THE ACCEPTABLE YEAR OF THE LORD." (Luke 4:18-19 NKJV)

Revelation 19:10 says that the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Jesus is the greatest of all prophets.

Jesus is also our High Priest.

II. Jesus as Priest

In the Old Testament, God appointed the priests to offer sacrifices. They also offered prayers and praise to God on behalf of the people. The prayers and sacrifices sanctified the people and made them acceptable to enter God's presence in a limited way.

In the New Testament, Jesus becomes our great High Priest. Jesus was greater than all of the Old Testament priests.

- ***Jesus offered the perfect sacrifice for sin—***

In the Old Testament, the Israelites brought lambs and other animals to the priest who would sacrifice them to God on their behalf. The sacrifices offered in the Old Testament had no intrinsic value to atone for sin. They foreshadowed the ultimate sacrifice that Christ would make. Old Testament sacrifices were not permanent. They had to be repeated over and over again. (Heb. 10:1-9)

- ***Jesus continually brings us near to God —***

The Old Testament priests represented the people when they offered sacrifices. Jesus does much more than that. As our perfect high priest, Jesus continually leads us into God's presence. We no longer need a Jerusalem temple or a special priesthood to stand between God and us. (Heb. 10:19-22). When Jesus died, the curtain in the temple was torn from top to bottom, allowing us all to enter the presence of God (Matt.15:38).

- ***Jesus continually prays for us —***

The Old Testament priests offered prayers on behalf of the people (Heb. 7:23-25). Jesus is superior to them because His sacrifice was both perfect and permanent.

In 1 Peter 2:9, Peter writes, "But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once *were* not a people but *are* now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy." (1 Peter 2:9-10 NKJV)

It is your blessing and responsibility to be a priest as a Christian. What changes you need to make in your life to become a godly priest or priestess? You may be the only person your friends or family can call upon to intercede before God on their behalf!

Hebrews 7:24 says, "But He, (Jesus) because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for

them.” (Hebrews 7:24-25 NKJV)

Jesus is also our King!

III. Jesus as King

The Kingdom of God is a central theme that runs through both the Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, God gave the King authority to rule over the nation of Israel. Kings were anointed just like the prophets and the priests when they came into office. Many Old Testament prophecies described the Messiah as King. Read these verses that describe Jesus as being King. Psalm 45:1-7 Psalm 89:3-4 Zechariah 6:12-13

The New Testament indicates that the kingdom of God is both present and future. To view the kingdom either as already totally realized or as totally futuristic corrupts the message of the New Testament.

Jesus has already been crowned as King. (Heb. 8:1; Rom. 8:34) Yet we await His triumphant return when every knee will bow before Him (Phil. 2:10). His coronation has already taken place, but His throne is not yet visible for all to see. But it's coming! Jesus was born to be King of the Jews (Matt. 2:2). But He refused any attempt by people to make him a king by earthly military and political power (John 6:15).

Our task is to make the invisible kingdom of Christ visible. We are priests and kings unto God. Our lives are examples that help people catch a glimpse of how great it is to have faith in Christ. In Revelation 5, John sees Jesus step forward to take the book out of the angel's hand, "And when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:8-10 NKJV)

We are not victims of our situation. We are disciples on a mission! We need to stop living below our privileges in Christ Jesus and start living and thanking God for His promises.

Conclusion

One of our goals is to manifest what is hidden to many people's eyes. Jesus is our Prophet, Priest, and King! He perfectly fulfills the role of mediator of the New Covenant. At His ascension, Jesus commanded His disciples to be His witnesses in the world (Acts 1:8). Jesus is counting on us to give witness to His life and ministry as the Christ, the Anointed One, the Messiah of God. Nonbelieving people today are ignorant of His sovereignty, or they deny it. Our task is to give visible witness to the invisible kingdom (Acts 1:8).

Let me close with this prayer of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians Chapter 1, "Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all."

(Ephesians 1: 15-23 NKJV)

If people could see what is invisible today, if they could just see Jesus sitting on His kingly throne, how do you think the world would respond? How do you respond?