

THE EPISTLES TO THE HEBREWS

HEBREWS 1:1-4:13, THE SUPERIORITY OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

- A. Outline of Hebrews (to be finalized at completion of Hebrews study)
1. The superiority of the person of Christ (1:1-4:13)
 - a. Christ has the superior message (1:1-2a)
 - b. Christ is the superior person (1:2b-3)
 - c. Christ is superior to angels (1:4-2:18)
 - d. Christ is superior to Moses (3:1-4:13)
 - 1) He is superior in His work and person (3:1-6)
- B. Review
1. William Barclay, *He has met our sorrows; he has faced our temptations. As a result, he knows exactly what help we need; and he can give it.*
 2. Warren Wiersbe, *When Jesus Christ became Man, He did not become inferior to the angels, for in His human body He accomplished something that angels could never accomplish. At the same time, He made it possible for us to share in His glory! He is not ashamed to call us His brothers and sisters. Are we ashamed to call Him "Lord"?*
- C. Comments on Hebrews 3:1-6
1. Leon Morris, *Now the author turns his attention to Moses, regarded by the Jews as the greatest of men. . . . The writer does nothing to belittle Moses. Nor does he criticize him. He accepts Moses' greatness but shows that as great as he was, Jesus was greater by far.*
 2. William L. Lane, *The writer demonstrates that both Jesus and Moses are "faithful," but that Jesus has a superior rank as Son in contrast to Moses' status as servant.*
 3. Warren Wiersbe, *Next to Abraham, Moses was undoubtedly the man most greatly revered by the Jewish people. To go back to the Law meant to go back to Moses, and the recipients of this Letter to the Hebrews were sorely tempted to do just that. It was important that the writer convince his readers that Jesus Christ is greater than Moses, for the entire system of Jewish religion came through Moses.*

HEBREWS 3:1-4:13, JESUS CHRIST IS SUPERIOR TO MOSES AND JOSHUA

HEBREWS 3:1-6, JESUS IS SUPERIOR TO MOSES

- A. Christians are to focus attention on Jesus (1)
1. The writer identifies the readers as Christians (1a), *Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling,*
 - a. *Therefore*
 - 1) The writer looks back to chapter 2 which identifies believers as those closely related to Jesus.
 - 2) H. D. M. Spence, . . . *But though a new branch of the argument begins, it is linked, after the artistic manner of the Epistle, to what has gone before in a continuous chain of thought.*
 - 3) Ray Stedman, *As in many chapter divisions in the New Testament, the opening words could as well have been the closing words of the previous chapter. The therefore ties them together and introduces a fifth title for Jesus thus far in Hebrews: Son, Firstborn, Lord, High Priest and now Apostle.*
 - b. Christians are related to Jesus.
 - 1) *holy brothers*
 - a) The writer addresses his readers for the first time and declares that they are *holy brothers* (only here in the New Testament).
 - b) As noted before, *brothers* may be best translated *brothers and sisters*.
 - c) They were made holy by Jesus.
 - 1] Hebrews 2:11a, *For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source.*
 - 2] William L. Lane, *The "brothers" are "holy" because they have been consecrated to the service of God by Jesus in his priestly role as the consecrator of the people of God (2:11).*

- 3] They are acknowledged by Jesus, Hebrews 2:11b, *That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers,*
 - 4] Jesus was made like them, Hebrews 2:17, *Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*
- d) Warren Wiersbe, *“Holy brethren” could only be applied to people in the family of God, set apart by the grace of God.*
- 2) *heavenly calling*
- a) Hebrews 2:10a, *For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory. . .*
 - b) Raymond Brown, *They are not only holy brothers, but heavenly partners; they have rich privileges, having become partakers or sharers in a heavenly call.*
 - c) Charles Spurgeon, *Unless you are a stranger here, and heaven is your home, you have not been called with a heavenly calling. For those who have been so called declare that they look for a city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God, and they themselves are strangers and pilgrims upon the earth.*
 - d) Zane Hodges, *The author was thinking especially of their high privilege of being invited to participate in the future dominion and joy of God’s King-Son.*
 - e) William Barclay, *The call that comes to Christians has a double direction. It is a calling from heaven and it is a calling to heaven. . . No one can afford merely to glance without interest at an invitation to God from God.*
- 3) *Comments*
- a) Thomas Constable, *We should give careful attention to Jesus because of our unity as brothers and our holy calling as participants in His future reign and joy (2:10–12).*
 - b) William L. Lane, *In 3:1 the writer describes the community as those called into the presence of God where they enjoy privileged access to him. . . They owe their privileged status not to Moses or to Aaron but to Jesus as their high priest who has entered heaven (9:24).*
2. They should consider the superior attributes of Jesus (1b), ***consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession,***
- a. *consider*
- 1) It means *notice, contemplate, ponder in a spiritual sense.*
 - 2) Luke 2:19, *But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.*
 - 3) R. Kent Hughes, *It means to apply one’s mind diligently—to fix one’s attention in such a way that the significance of the thing is learned.*
 - 4) William Barclay, *It does not mean simply to look at or to notice a thing. Anyone can look at a thing or even notice it without really seeing it. The word means to fix the attention on something in such a way that its inner meaning, the lesson that it is designed to teach, may be learned.*
 - 5) Charles Spurgeon, *He is supremely worthy of our perpetual consideration from all points of view. . . If you think little of your Leader you will live but poor lives. Consider Him, often think of Him, try to copy Him. With such a Leader what manner of people ought we to be?*
- b. *Reasons why Jesus is worthy of consideration.*
- 1) He is *the apostle.*
 - a) An apostle is one sent by another for a purpose.
 - b) Jesus was sent by the Father, John 20:21, *Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.”*
 - c) He was sent for a purpose to Hebrews, Romans 15:8, *For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs,*
 - d) Thomas Constable, . . . *He is the One God sent to reveal the Father to humankind. . .*
 - 1] John 1:14, *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*
 - 2] John 3:17, *For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.*

- 3] John 3:34, *For he whom God has sent utters the words of God, for he gives the Spirit without measure.*
 - 4] John 17:8, *For I have given them the words that you gave me, and they have received them and have come to know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.*
 - e) Raymond Brown, *In first-century thought and practice the specially appointed envoy possessed the full powers and was regarded as the personal representative of the one sending him. Jesus has been sent to fulfil a definite mission for God. He was sent not only to proclaim the truth but also to manifest it (1:2–3).*
 - f) R. Kent Hughes, *His apostleship is prior to all apostleship and is the foundation of all that would follow. His apostleship meant “mission accomplished.”*
- 2) He is high priest.
 - a) Jesus’ role as high priest is mentioned in Hebrews 2:17, *Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.*
 - b) R. Kent Hughes, *And, of course, Jesus is also the “high priest” par excellence. Because he was perfectly human and perfectly divine, he knows both man and God. Thus he is able to speak to men for God and to intercede to God for men.*
 - 3) *our confession*
 - a) William L. Lane, . . . *“the apostle and high priest of whom our confession speaks.” With this phrase the writer gathers up what he has said about Jesus as the divine Son and relates it to the commitment expressed by his hearers. . . It connotes the essential core of Christian conviction that the writer shared with his audience (“our confession”).*
 - b) H. D. M. Spence, . . . *Jesus, as Apostle and High Priest, is the object of our confession of faith. On Jesus, then, being such, the readers are called to fix earnestly their mental gaze, and in doing so take further note of his superiority to Moses, which is the subject of what follows.*
 - c) William L. Lane, *The coordination of the phrase “apostle and high priest” indicates that the writer is concerned to emphasize the indivisibility of the two offices. The revelation accomplished in Jesus is characterized neither by the word alone nor by the priestly office alone, but by both in conjunction.*
 - d) Donald Hagner, *He is indeed both the apostle and high priest whom we confess. That is, the objective truth that we profess as Christians has been delivered by Jesus as apostle and accomplished by Jesus as high priest. Jesus as the one sent by God represents God to humanity; Jesus as high priest represents humanity to God.*

B. Jesus is superior to Moses in His work (2-4)

1. Jesus was faithful just as Moses was faithful in God’s house (2), ***who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God’s house.***
 - a. Jesus is faithful to God who appointed Him.
 - 1) 1 Samuel 2:35, *And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before my anointed forever.*
 - 2) Jesus is faithful now even as Moses was in the past.
 - 3) The emphasis is on Jesus’ faithfulness in the present since the participle is present tense.
 - 4) H. D. M. Spence, . . . *the main point of what follows is that Christ is over God’s house, not in it, as Moses was.*
 - 5) R. Kent Hughes, *So the central point here is that Jesus is superior to Moses because Jesus is the builder, and Moses is part of the house/household.*
 - b. Moses was faithful in God’s house.
 - 1) This looks to Numbers 12:7, *Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house.*
 - 2) Thomas Constable, *We can see Moses’ faithfulness in how he served regarding God’s “house,” the tabernacle, and regarding God’s “household,” Israel.*
 - 3) Zane Hodges, *The reference to Moses being faithful in all God’s house was drawn from Numbers 12:7 in which the tabernacle furnished the backdrop. Hence God’s “house” in the Old Testament situation would be the tabernacle itself which Moses had constructed in strict obedience to the divine directions.*

- 4) Raymond Brown, *It is important for the writer to make it absolutely clear that in exalting Christ, believers are not thereby depreciating Moses.*
- 5) R. Kent Hughes, *This comparison between the builder and the house in no way minimizes Moses. His faithfulness is not in question. In fact, God highly honored him. Jesus built the spiritual house of God—Moses was a leader in the house.*
- 6) John Martin on *God's house*, *It appears to involve the tabernacle worship (called a house in the O.T.) which Moses set upon God's command.*

2. Jesus has more glory since He is builder of the house (3-4), ***For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.)***

a. Jesus is compared to the builder of a house who has more honor than the house he built.

- 1) Thomas Constable, *We can see the difference between Jesus Christ's superiority and Moses' by comparing the builder of a building with the building itself. No matter how grand a building may be its creator always gets more glory than the building itself. Whereas Moses served faithfully in the system of worship the tabernacle represented, Jesus Christ designed that system of worship.*
- 2) R. Kent Hughes, . . . *while both Moses and Jesus were faithful in their God-given callings, Jesus' was greater because his work was greater. . . Jesus built the spiritual house of God—Moses was a leader in the house. They are simply in different categories that are beyond comparison because Jesus' calling is so superior.*
- 3) Raymond Brown, *Moses was a faithful steward in the house, but Christ is its owner.*

b. Concerning *glory* and *honor*.

- 1) The glory of Moses is the honor received from God for his faithful service as a servant
 - a) Number 12:7, *Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house.*
 - b) Deuteronomy 34:10, *And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face,*
 - c) R. Kent Hughes, *To all Jews, Moses was simply the greatest.*
- 2) The glory of Jesus is based on His faithful service as Son.
 - a) As Apostle - Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *the first apostle, the great apostle, the source of all apostleship.*
 - b) As High Priest - R. Kent Hughes, *He is the one person through whom man comes to God and God to man.*
 - c) His glory is evidenced by His exaltation to the right hand of the Father.
 - d) William Barclay, . . . *Moses was the servant; but Jesus was the Son. Moses knew a little about God; Jesus was God. Therein lies the secret of his superiority.*
 - e) Charles Spurgeon, *However highly a Jew may think of Moses—and he ought to think highly of him, and so ought we—yet infinitely higher than Moses must ever rise the incarnate Son of God.*

c. God is the builder of all things.

- 1) William L. Lane, *Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses in the same measure as God has more honor than the universe he created.*
- 2) Zane Hodges, *But Jesus as a Builder excels Moses in honor since Moses was simply a servant carrying out instructions. But what Jesus has built is, in fact, everything, for God is the Builder of "everything."*
- 3) R. Kent Hughes, *In fact, God the Father has made everything in the universe through his Son, Jesus (1:2).*
- 4) Charles Spurgeon, concerning Jesus, *"apart from him not one thing came into being that has come into being" (John 1:3). So He is to have eternal honor and glory as the one great Master-builder.*

C. Jesus is superior to Moses in His person (5-6)

1. Moses' function in God's house was as a servant and a prophet (5), ***Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later,***

a. He was a servant in all God's house.

- 1) *Now*
 - a) Note Hebrews 3:2b, . . . *just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house.*
 - b) It is a citation from Numbers 12:7, *Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house.*

- 2) *a servant*
 - a) Exodus 14:31, *Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses.*
 - b) Deuteronomy 34:5, *So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD,*
 - c) Psalm 105:26, *He sent Moses, his servant, and Aaron, whom he had chosen.*
 - d) Revelation 15:3, *And they sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and amazing are your deeds, O Lord God the Almighty! Just and true are your ways, O King of the nations!"*
 - e) Warren Wiersbe, *The Greek word translated "servant" (Heb. 3:5) is not the usual New Testament word for servant or slave. This word carries the meaning of "a voluntary servant who acts because of affection." In the New Testament, it is used only of Moses. At the beginning of his ministry, Moses was a bit hesitant and resisted God's call. But once he surrendered, he obeyed out of a heart of love and devotion.*
 - b. He was a prophet who represented greater things to come.
 - 1) Deuteronomy 18:15-16, *The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen—just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.'*
 - 2) Thomas Constable, *Moses functioned as a servant preparing something that would serve as a model for a later time. The tabernacle was a model of the world over which Jesus Christ will reign eventually (cf. 1:8–13; 2:8), first in the Millennium and then in the new heavens and earth.*
 - 3) Zane Hodges, *God's house in which Moses was faithful was a kind of miniature representation of "everything," that is, of the greater house over which the Son presides at God's right hand in heaven (cf. 1:3 with 4:14). The "holy of holies" in His earthly house was but a shadow of heaven itself where Christ has now gone "to appear for us in God's presence" (9:24).*
2. Jesus' function in God' house was as the Son (6a), ***but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son.***
- a. Thomas Constable, *The tabernacle illustrated this house of God. The tabernacle was a microcosm of God's greater house. Moses served in the model faithfully. Jesus rules over the larger house faithfully, not as a servant, but as God's Son with full authority.*
 - b. Zane Hodges, *Moses' fidelity consisted in erecting that shadow house, the tabernacle, so that it could properly prefigure the future order of priestly activity which now has the universe itself as its proper sphere. This is the sphere where the exalted Christ sits faithful in all His current ministrations as well as past ones, functioning as a Son over God's house (3:6a).*
 - c. Donald Hagner, *In Moses we have promise; in the Son we have fulfillment, for in him God has accomplished his saving purposes.*
3. Believers are of God's house (6b), ***And we are his house, if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.***
- a. *we are his house*
 - 1) 1 Peter 2:5, *you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.*
 - 2) H. D. M. Spence, *We Christians constitute this completed "house of God," over which Christ reigns as Son;*
 - 3) William L. Lane, . . . "we are," *serves to emphasize the corporate conception of the church as the "house of God." The correlation between Jesus and the house is the relationship between the faithful priest and the faithful house . . . The hearers became the house of God through Christian faith and hope.*
 - 4) Donald Hagner, *In the words we are his house the author has in mind the church, that is, the people of God, the community of faith, the recipient of the salvation brought by Christ.*
 - b. *if we indeed hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope*
 - 1) Introductory comments
 - a) Ray Stedman, *This if has troubled many people for it seems to imply that being a member of Christ's house can be lost after it is gained by wavering in our courage or hope.*
 - b) As noted earlier in this study of Hebrews, the warning passages can't speak of loss of salvation since salvation is a gift.
 - c) The warning must deal with false profession or loss of reward.

- 2) False profession
 - a) Ray Stedman, *But the statement is more likely descriptive rather than conditional. It tells us that courage or boldness, and the demonstration of hope in word and deed is the continuing mark of those who belong to Christ. It does not rule out periods of weak faith and struggle.*
 - b) Charles Spurgeon, *None are truly Christ's but those who persevere in grace. Men may be nominally Christ's, but they are not Christ's house unless they hold fast to the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end. . . He whom God has chosen holds on and holds out even to the end, while temporary professors make only a fair show in the flesh, but, by-and-by, their faith vanishes away.*
 - c) Warren Wiersbe, . . . *the writer is affirming that those who hold fast their confidence and hope are proving that they are truly born again. . . We should not have confidence in ourselves, because we are too prone to fail; but we should have confidence in Jesus Christ who never fails.*
 - d) R. Kent Hughes, *Are you holding on to "the hope of which we boast"? That is, are you proud of the gospel? Was there a time in your life, perhaps with the fresh glow of new faith, when you were proud and courageous for Christ, but now, with the passing of time, your proper pride, your boast, and your courage are gone? If so, God's Word says you must hold on to it.*

- 3) Loss of reward (priestly service)
 - a) Zane Hodges, . . . *just as one who was a true Levite by birth could withdraw from participation in the tabernacle of Moses' day, so too one who is truly a Christian by new birth may withdraw from his priestly role within the functioning household. It was precisely this danger which concerned the writer, in the present warning passage as well as in later ones.*
 - b) Thomas Constable, *Instead of all the Israelites being priests (Exod. 19:6) God limited this privilege to the Levites who remained faithful when the other Israelites apostatized (Exod. 32:26–29; cf. Num. 3:12–13). Just so today it is possible for us to forfeit the privilege of functioning as a priest in the future (cf. 1 Pet. 2:5).*
 - c) Joseph Dillow, *When we withdraw from the exercise of our priestly New Testament worship, we are no longer fellowshiping with the other believers. But this does not mean we are not saved or that we had salvation and lost it.*

- 4) Comments
 - a) Raymond Brown, *Formally 'cut off' from Judaism because of their new-found Christian faith, isolated from family and friends, some of these Jewish Christians felt bereft and alone. It was necessary to remind them that in Christ they most certainly belong to the house of God and as such are eternally safe and secure. They may have been cast out of the local synagogue, but they have not been cast out by God...the privilege is retained by those who, through his strength alone, maintain their loyalty and hold on to their boldness, whatever the opposition, and to their hope, however attractive the alternatives.*
 - b) Consider 1 Corinthians 3:11-15, *For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.*

CONCLUSION

- Warren Wiersbe, *The writer exhorted these suffering saints to enjoy their spiritual experience and not simply endure it. Jesus Christ is the beloved Son over His house, and He will care for each member of the family. He is the faithful High Priest who provides all the grace we need for each demand of life. As the Great Shepherd of the sheep (Heb. 13:19–20), Jesus Christ is using the experiences in His people's lives to equip them for service that will glorify His name.*
- R. Kent Hughes, *Focus on—hold on—to Christ, our great, superior apostle and high priest.*