

## "The Superiority of Jesus Christ over the Prophets"

### Hebrews 1:1-3

#### Part 1

**Introduction:** Tonight we come back to our study of the book of Hebrews and as we do we shall step into the first verses of this letter but before we get to the verses I want to refresh our minds about some of what we looked at last week.

Last week we looked at several points about the letter.

#### 1. **When the letter was written.**

The letter had to be written before AD 70 because in AD 70 the Temple was destroyed and at the time of the writing of this letter the Temple and the sacrificial system was still in operation.

Also in this letter we see that the believers whom this letter was written to were saved long enough that they should have been teachers themselves.

#### **Hebrews 5:12**

*<sup>12</sup> For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.*

Therefore, these believers had been saved sometime after the resurrection of Jesus Christ and before the destruction of the Temple and they had to be saved for a while. The letter was probably written sometime close to AD 70. But the point we need to keep in mind is that the Temple and the sacrificial system were still in operation.

2. **Who the letter was written to and what was happening in their lives at this time.**

The letter was written to Jewish believers who were saved out of Judaism. But at the time of the writing of this letter there was great pressure within their lives. Because they were saved they were being called to walk away from the very worship system which their fathers had been a part of for thousands of years. They were now taught that there was no need of the sacrificial worship system anymore.

Then on top of all of traditional struggles they were going through there was the pressure of the Jewish community. Because of their faith in Jesus Christ they were not allowed to enter the temple; they were banished from the altar, the sacrifice, the high priest, and the house of Jehovah. They were treated worse than the Gentiles for they were cut off from the commonwealth of Israel. These believers were trying to straddle the fence in the sense that they were trying to hold on to the sacrificial system and at the same time walk in their new life in Christ. They were very much in danger of bring Judaism and Christianity together which would have been legalism.

3. **Why the letter was written.**

The writer of Hebrews was calling these believers to walk away from Judaism and to move on in their spiritual growth to spiritual maturity.

**Hebrews 6:1-2**

*Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,*

<sup>2</sup> *Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.*

This brings us to where we are tonight. Before we get into the verses tonight there is one more point I want us to consider under the introduction.

4. **The writer.**

There are many opinions about who the writer of Hebrews was but the bottom line is that we do not know because he never identified himself in the letter. Some believe that Apollos wrote the letter, some believe that Barnabas wrote the letter, but the majority of those who take a stand on the writer believe Paul wrote the letter. There are several reasons which others will point out but let me show you 2:

a. **The writer was a companion of Timothy.**

**Hebrews 13:23**

<sup>23</sup> *Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you.*

Now we do know that Timothy was a companion of the Apostle Paul.

b. **Peter made mention of Paul's writings.**

I will show you a verse but before I do I need to remind you that Peter was writing to Jewish believers.

**2 Peter 3:15**

<sup>15</sup> *And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you:[the Jewish believers]*

Peter tells us that Paul wrote to the Jewish believers and those who believe Paul to be the writer of Hebrews tell us that Hebrews must be the letter which Peter was talking about for there are no other letters written by Paul addressed to Jewish believers.

But that leaves us with a question, "If Paul was the writer then why did he not identify himself as he did in his other letters?" There are two possible reasons:

1. If Paul was the writer and he placed his name at the beginning of this letter many Jews would have wanted nothing to do with it.

### **Acts 21:27-28**

*<sup>27</sup> And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him,*

*<sup>28</sup> Crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place.*

2. If Paul was the writer he may not have recorded his name because all the focus is to be the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul may have written the letter but God chose not to reveal to us who the writer was so we will just refer to the writer as "the writer".

## **I. The Superiority of Christ over the Prophets**

### **Part 1**

### **Hebrews 1:1-3**

The writer does not give to us an introduction to the letter but instead he leads us right into deep water.

### **Notice Hebrews 1:1-2**

The focus of this entire letter is to show a contrast between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. The writer opens up this letter by showing that Jesus Christ is better than the Old Testament prophets. But he does it in a way that we do not at first see on the surface. He opens the letter in these two verses with a contrast between the Old Testament prophets and Jesus Christ. But it is not a contrast like we normally think about. When we think about a contrast we think about something like God's righteousness against the sinfulness of man. The contrast here is different. The contrast here is focused upon their unity. The Old Testament prophets all pointed to the Promise of the Messiah but when Jesus came He was the fulfillment of those prophecies. Therefore He is better than the prophets.

But let us now look closely at the verses because there is much here for us to learn.

### **Notice Hebrews 1:1**

Here the writer opens the letter by giving words that would have been welcomed by his Jewish readers. The focus in this verse is on God and how HE spoke to their fathers by the prophets. These words are meant to affirm the Divine inspiration of the Old Testament. These words are meant to grasp the attention of the Jewish readers. Notice the words of A. Saphir:

*"This solemn acknowledgment of the fundamental importance and divine authority of the Scripture is from the very outset to gain the*

*confidence and to establish the hearts of the Hebrew brethren. It is to give them the assured and trustful feeling of home."*

The writer does not want to turn away the Jewish readers for it is his desire to lead them forward not to push them backwards.

But there is even more within this verse. While the writer is affirming the Divine inspiration of the Old Testament he is at the same time pointing to truth that the Old Testament was fragmented.

### **Hebrews 1:1**

*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,*

The term "**sundry times**" according to Vines Dictionary means "**in many parts**" or "**portions**". The idea here is that the Old Testament spoke of Jesus Christ but the picture was fragmented. Let me show you the words of A. Saphir on this thought:

*"We notice the imperfect and fragmentary character of the old dispensation, when we consider not merely the words, but the types, which are living prophecies. There was not a single one which could stand by itself, it had always to be supplemented. Abel shows to us that the righteous shepherd was to suffer and die ; Enoch that the man of God would be lifted up into the heavens ; Noah that there will be a Righteous One who will save not merely himself, but others, out of the destruction and judgment which sin draws down from a holy God. If we want to have an idea of the salvation of God we must combine the three —Abel, Enoch, and Noah—in one person; the Righteous Man, who suffers, saves, and enters into glory. Moses is a type of a mediator, prophet, priest, and king; but to obtain a view of the true*

*Redeemer you must combine him with Joshua, for only Joshua leads the people into the Promised Land. Melchizedek is a priest and king, but we must combine him with Aaron in order to have an idea of atonement and of intercession, as well as of blessing and rule. David is a shepherd meek and lowly, a man who does not lift up him-self above his brethren, and rules in love and in justice ; but we must combine him with Solomon to get the idea of the kingship, both in its gentleness, sympathy, and suffering, and in its glory and extensiveness. Wherever we go we find it is in fragments. There is an altar; there is a sacrifice. There is a fourfold sacrifice, a sin-offering, a burnt-offering, a peace-offering, a meat-offering. There is a high priest; there is a tabernacle; there is a holy of holies; there is a candlestick; there is a shewbread; there is a veil. Everything a fragment ; everything in itself showing unto us some aspect of truth, some portion of the treasure, without which we would be poor ; but we must combine them all to see the full and blessed truth."*

There is another point to be seen in verse 1.

### **Hebrews 1:1**

*God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,*

The words "***divers manners***" here mean "***in many manners***". I believe we need to look closely at this in order to understand what is being said here. I **don't** believe this refers to the various ways in which God spoke to His prophets. In the Old Testament God spoke to the prophets through visions, dreams, angels, and sometimes an audible voice but I do not believe that is the thought here.

**Notice Hebrews 1:1 again.**

It is talking about how God spoke THROUGH the prophets in "divers manners" not necessarily how He spoke TO the prophets. This is a reference to the different Books of the Old Testament and the different ways in which they present Jesus Christ. The prophets of the Old Testament all wrote concerning Jesus Christ and His coming but it was all fragmented and it was revealed to each writer in a different light and in a different way and therefore the different writers have given various revelations about Jesus Christ.

Martin Luther used a word picture that illustrates the Old Testament writers and the New Testament writers very well. He compared this to the men who carried the grapes back from the Promise Land. The grapes were on a pole between 2 men.

**Numbers 13:23**

*<sup>23</sup> And they came unto the brook of Eshcol, and cut down from thence a branch with one cluster of grapes, and they bare it between two upon a staff; and they brought of the pomegranates, and of the figs.*

The man in the front is a picture of the Old Testament prophets. He knew he was carrying something that would be a great encouragement to those who were waiting but he could not see what it was that he was carrying. The man in the back pictures the New Testament writer who came behind the prophets. This man could smell the fragrance and he could clearly see that which the man in the front was carrying.

Back to Hebrews: the writer is affirming the Divine inspiration of the Old Testament so as to set at ease his Jewish readers.

**Application:**

Let me just say that there are many people who will study nothing but the letters which were written by Paul and they will spend very little time in the Old Testament. I just need to remind you that in the Old Testament there are some beautiful pictures of Jesus Christ and to avoid the study of the Old Testament is to miss many of these pictures. It is fragmented but the Truth you and I will find in the New Testament is something that will greatly solidify your faith. Let me just share with you some of the fragments to stir your spirit.

**Genesis 2:21-22**

*<sup>21</sup> And the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof;*

*<sup>22</sup> And the rib, which the LORD God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man.*

Here is a beautiful picture of the death of our Lord and the making of a bride for Him. The deep sleep which Adam fell into is a picture of the death of Jesus. The removal of the rib or flesh from Adam's side is a picture of the bloodshed by our Lord for the purpose of you and me becoming His bride. The presentation of Eve to Adam is a picture of the rapture of the church when the bride of Christ will be gathered and brought to Him.

**Genesis 3:15**

*<sup>15</sup> And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.*

The Seed of the woman here is Christ and in this verse we see a picture of His victory over Satan. The word "bruise" means "to crush".

### **Genesis 3:21**

*<sup>21</sup> Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them.*

Here is a picture of the death of Christ as the payment for the sins of man.

### **Jonah 1:12-15**

*<sup>12</sup> And he said unto them, Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you.*

*<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not: for the sea wrought, and was tempestuous against them.*

*<sup>14</sup> Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee.*

*<sup>15</sup> So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.*

Here we see the willingness of Jonah to die for the other mariners as a picture of the willingness of our Lord to die for us. The death of Christ is seen when they threw him overboard.

### **Jonah 1:17**

*<sup>17</sup> Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*

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Here in the book of Jonah we see the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We could go on and on but time does not permit.

**Conclusion:**

We will see next week that the writer is using verse 1 in order to show his readers that Jesus Christ is better than the prophets because He is the completion of all of their writings. They had fragments of the Truth but when Jesus came God brought all of that Truth together in one Man.