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The Superiority Of Christ

(Hebrews 1:1-2)

1

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. (1:1-2)

The writer does not delay in getting to his point. He makes it in the first three verses. These verses are very simple. They tell us Christ is superior to everyone and everything. The three primary features of His superiority are: preparation, presentation, and preeminence. Keep in mind that all through the book Christ is presented as being better than the best of everyone and everything that was before Him—absolutely better than anything the Old Testament, the Old Covenant, provided.

THE PREPARATION FOR CHRIST

God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways. (1:1)

Here is an indication of how God wrote the Old Testament. Its

purpose was to prepare for the coming of Christ. Whether by prophecy or type or principle or commandment or whatever, it made preparation for Christ.

The senses of man, marvelous as they are, are incapable of reaching beyond the natural world. For us to know anything about God, He must tell us. We could never know God if He did not speak to us. Thus, in the Old Testament, the writer reminds us, “God . . . spoke.”

MAN’S WAYS TO GOD

Man lives in a natural “box,” which encloses him within its walls of time and space. Outside of this box is the supernatural, and somewhere deep inside himself man knows it is out there. But in himself he does not know anything certain about it. So someone comes along and says, “We must find out about the supernatural, the world ‘out there.’” And a new religion is born. Those who become interested run over to the edge of the box, get out their imaginative mental chisels and start trying to chip a hole in the edge of the box—through which they can crawl, or at least peer, out and discover the secrets of the other world.

That, figuratively, is what always happens. The Buddhist says that when you have worked and thought yourself into Nirvana, all of a sudden you are out of the box. You have transcended the natural and have found your way into the supernatural. The Muslim says basically the same thing, though in different words. So do all the other religions—Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Confucianism, or whatever it may be. These are all attempts by man to escape from the natural to the supernatural, to get out of the box. But the problem is, he cannot get himself out.

GOD’S WAY TO MAN

By definition, natural man cannot escape into the supernatural. We cannot go into a religious phone booth and change into a superman. We cannot in ourselves or by ourselves transcend our natural existence. If we are to know anything about God, it will not be by escaping, or climbing, or thinking, or working our way to Him; it will only be by His coming to us, His speaking to us. We cannot, by ourselves, understand God any more than an insect we may hold in our hand can understand us. Nor can we condescend to its level, or communicate with it if we could. But God can condescend to our level and He can communicate with us. And He has.

God became a man Himself and entered our box to tell us about Himself, more fully and completely than He was able to do even through His prophets. This not only was divine revelation, but personal divine revelation of the most literal and perfect and wonderful sort. All of man’s

religions reflect his attempts to make his way out of the box. The message of Christianity, however, is that “the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10).

When God burst into the box, He did it in human form, and the name of that human form is Jesus Christ. That is the difference between Christianity and every other religion in the world. That is why it is so foolish for people to say, “It doesn’t make any difference what you believe or what religion you follow.” It makes every difference. Every religion is but man’s attempt to discover God. Christianity is God bursting into man’s world and showing and telling man what He is like. Because man by himself is incapable of identifying, comprehending, or understanding God at all, God had to invade the world of man and speak to him about Himself. Initially, He told us He would be coming.

BY THE PROPHETS: MANY WAYS

This He did through the words of the Old Testament. He used men as instruments, but was Himself behind them, enlightening and energizing them. The deists teach that God started the world going and then went away, leaving it to run by itself. But God is not detached from His creation; He is not uninvolved in our world. The true and living God, unlike the false gods of man’s making, is not dumb or indifferent. The God of Scripture, unlike the impersonal “First Cause” of some philosophers, is not silent. He speaks. He first spoke in the Old Testament, which is not a collection of the wisdom of ancient men but is the voice of God.

Now notice how God spoke: **in many portions and in many ways**. The writer uses a play on words in the original language: “God, *polumerōs* and *polutropōs* . . .” These two Greek words are interesting. They mean, respectively, “in many portions” (as of books) and “in many different manners.” There are many books in the Old Testament—thirty-nine of them. In all those **many portions** (*polumerōs*) and in **many ways** (*polutropōs*) God spoke to men. Sometimes it was in a vision, sometimes by a parable, sometimes through a type or a symbol. There were many different ways in which God spoke in the Old Testament. But it is always God speaking. Even the words spoken by men and angels are included because He wants us to know them.

Men were used—their minds were used and their personalities were used—but they were totally controlled by the Spirit of God. Every word they wrote was the word that God decided they should write and delighted in their writing.

Many ways includes many literary ways. Some of the Old Testament is narrative. Some of it is poetry, in beautiful Hebrew meter. The “many ways” also includes many types of content. Some is law; some is

prophecy; some is doctrinal; some is ethical and moral; some is warning; some is encouragement; and so on. But it is all God speaking.

PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

TRUE BUT INCOMPLETE

Yet, beautiful and important and authoritative as it is, the Old Testament is fragmentary and incomplete. It was delivered over the course of some fifteen hundred years by some forty-plus writers—in many different pieces, each with its own truths. It began to build and grow, truth upon truth. It was what we call progressive revelation. Genesis gives some truth, and Exodus gives some more. The truth builds and builds and builds. In the Old Testament God was pleased, for that time, to dispense His gracious truth to the Jews by the mouths of His prophets—in many different ways, developing His revelation progressively from lesser to greater degrees of light. The revelation did not build from error to truth but from incomplete truth to more complete truth. And it remained incomplete until the New Testament was finished.

Divine revelation, then, going from the Old Testament to the New Testament, is progressive revelation. It progressed from promise to fulfillment. The Old Testament is promise; the New Testament is fulfillment. Jesus Christ said, “Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets,” that is, the Old Testament, “. . . but to fulfill” (Matt. 5:17). His revelation progressed from promise to fulfillment. In fact, the Old Testament itself clearly indicates that the men of faith who wrote it were trusting in a promise they had not yet understood. They trusted in a promise that was yet to be fulfilled.

Let me give a few supporting verses. Hebrews 11 speaks about many of the great saints of the Old Testament. “And all these, having gained approval through their faith, did not receive what was promised” (v. 39). In other words, they never saw the fulfillment of promise. They foresaw what was going to happen without seeing it fully realized. Peter tells us that the Old Testament prophets did not understand all of what they wrote. “As to this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that would come to you made careful search and inquiry, seeking to know what person or time the Spirit of Christ within them was indicating as He predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories to follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves, but you, in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the gospel to you” (1 Pet. 1:10-12).

We must, of course, clearly understand that the Old Testament was not in any way erroneous. But there was in it a development, of

spiritual light and of moral standards, until God's truth was refined and finalized in the New Testament. The distinction is not in the validity of the revelation—its rightness or wrongness—but in the completeness of it and the time of it. Just as children are first taught letters, then words, and then sentences, so God gave His revelation. It began with the “picture book” of types and ceremonies and prophecies and progressed to final completion in Jesus Christ and His New Testament.

FROM GOD, THROUGH HIS MESSENGERS

Now the picture is set for us. Long ago God spoke to **the fathers**, the Old Testament people, our spiritual ancestors—also our physical ancestors if we are Jewish. He even spoke to some of our Gentile predecessors. He spoke to them by the prophets, His messengers. A prophet is one who speaks to men for God; a priest is one who speaks to God for men. The priest takes man's problems to God; the prophet takes God's message to men. Both, if they are true, are commissioned by God, but their ministries are quite different. The book of Hebrews has a great deal to say about priests, but its opening verse speaks of prophets. The Holy Spirit establishes the divine authorship of the Old Testament, its accuracy and its authority, through the fact that it was given to and delivered by God's prophets.

Throughout the New Testament this truth is affirmed. Peter, for example, tells us that “no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet. 1:21). “Prophecy” in that text refers to the Old Testament. No human writer of the Old Testament wrote of his own will, but only as he was directed by the Holy Spirit.

Paul also tells us that “all Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16). All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. The *American Standard Version* reads, “Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable,” implying that not all Scripture is inspired. But all Scripture is fully, not simply in part, inspired by God. God has not hidden His Word within man's words, leaving His creatures to their own devices in deciding which is which. The Old Testament is only a part of God's truth, but it is not partially His truth. It is not His complete truth, but it is completely His truth. It is God's revelation, His progressive revelation preparing His people for the coming of His Son, Jesus Christ.

BY THE SON: ONE WAY

In these last days [God] has spoken to us in His Son, whom He ap-

pointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.
(1:2)

God's full, perfect revelation awaited the coming of His Son. God, who used to speak in many different ways through many different people, has finally spoken in one way, through one Person, His Son Jesus Christ.

The whole New Testament is centered around Christ. The gospels tell His story, the epistles comment on it, and the Revelation tells of its culmination. From beginning to end the New Testament is Christ. No prophet had been given God's whole truth. The Old Testament was given to many men, in bits and pieces and fragments. Jesus not only brought, but was, God's full and final Revelation.

COMING IN THESE LAST DAYS

There are several ways to interpret the phrase, **in these last days**. It could refer to the last days of revelation. It could mean that this is the final revelation in Christ, there being nothing else to add to it. Or it could mean that in the last days of revelation it came through God's Son. But I think the writer is making a messianic reference. The phrase "the last days" was very familiar to the Jews of that day and had a distinctive meaning. Whenever a Jew saw or heard these words he immediately had messianic thoughts, because the scriptural promise was that in the last days Messiah would come (Jer.33:14-16; Mic. 5:1-4; Zech. 9:9, 16). Since this letter was written first of all to Jews, we will interpret the phrase in that context.

The woman at the well, though a Samaritan, told Jesus, "I know that the Messiah is coming (He who is called Christ); when that One comes, He will declare all things to us" (John 4:25). She knew that when Messiah arrived, He would unfold the full and final revelation of God, as indeed He did.

The writer, then, is saying, "In these promised Last Days Messiah (Christ) has come and has spoken the final revelation of God." Jesus came in these last days. Unfortunately, Messiah's own people rejected Him and His revelation, and so the fulfillment of all of the promises of the last days has yet to be fully realized.

TRUE AND COMPLETE

The Old Testament had been given in pieces. To Noah was revealed the quarter of the world from which Messiah would come. To Micah, the town where He would be born. To Daniel, the time of His birth. To Malachi, the forerunner who would come before Him. To Jonah, His resurrection was typified. Every one of those pieces of revela-

tion was true and accurate; and each one related to the others in some way or another. And each one in some way or another pointed to the Messiah, the Christ. But only in Jesus Christ Himself was everything brought together and made whole. In Him the revelation was full and complete.

Since the revelation is complete, to add anything to the New Testament is blasphemous. To add to it The Book of Mormon, or Science and Health, or anything else that claims to be revelation from God is blasphemous. "God has in these last days finalized His revelation in His Son." It was finished. The end of the book of Revelation warns that if we add anything to it, its plagues will be added to us, and that if we take anything away from it, our part in the tree of life and the holy city will be taken away from us (Rev. 22:18-19).

In the first verse and a half of Hebrews, the Holy Spirit establishes the preeminence of Jesus Christ over all the Old Testament, over its message, its methods, and its messengers. It was just what those Jews, believing and nonbelieving, needed to hear.

And so is established the priority of Jesus Christ. He is greater than the prophets. He is greater than any revelation in the Old Testament, for He is the embodiment of all that truth, and more. God has fully expressed Himself in Christ.