

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Lesson # 9 November 6, 2016

Hebrews 3:1-6 The Greater Glory of Christ the Son

Introduction to Chapter 3

The first 6 verses set the tone for the rest of the chapter and present the reader with the doctrinal basis for the rest of the chapter. Having presented an iron-clad case for the superiority of Jesus Christ over angels, with the intention of stopping those who contemplated leaving Christ to return to Judaism; the author now draws our attention to [probably & arguably] the greatest OT personage – Moses, and shows how Jesus is also superior to him. Competitors to this lofty position could be Abraham, Noah, or David).

Consider Moses' history and greatness in our Bibles. He had been miraculously spared from death as a baby in Egypt; he performed numerous miracles and signs; through his leadership and trust in God, he led the captive Israelites out of Egypt and through the parted waters of the Red Sea; he spoke with God on Mt. Sinai, and when he came down from the mountain, his face shone with the reflected glory of God (Ex. 34:29); he was the one through whom God gave the law, and not only the ten commandments, but also the Levitical / ceremonial law as well; he oversaw the building of the tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant; and he preached God's Word; he led the people through wilderness for 40 years and was uniquely buried by God Himself when he died – Deut. 34:1-8. Interestingly, NT author Jude records in Jude 9 that Michael the Archangel disputed with the devil over the body of Moses in this somewhat cryptic passage.

Faithful Jews loved and revered Moses. Notice Jesus' admonition in JN 5:30-47. This passage reveals the mindset of "the Jews" as Jesus healed a man who had been an invalid for 38 years on the Sabbath and they railed against Him. In JN 6:32ff, Jesus pointed out to them that Moses, whom they believed had given them the manna, was not the source of the manna, God was (cf. JN 6:30-51), so Moses, for many (if not most) Jews, had become an idol. Notice JN 5:42-47, where Jesus argues that Moses even wrote about Him!

So the author of Hebrews, admitting to the greatness and faithfulness of Moses, puts him up against Jesus, and he is shown to be inferior by far in light of who Jesus is. From vv. 7-18, the author sets up the second warning passage of the book, which starts in 3:12 and runs to 4:13, to show what our response is to be when confronted with the person of Christ, as the hauntingly sad (for him) question of Pilate rings out in our heads in MK 5:12, "What shall I do with the man you call the King of the Jews?"

The Apostle and High Priest of Our Confession v. 1-2

Holy Brethren who share in a heavenly call

The familiar connector word, “Therefore” begins this section, showing us that, though the subject in particular has been changed, the underlying theme has not. The author is still dealing with the superiority of Jesus Christ.

By addressing the recipients of the letter as “holy brethren” who share in a “heavenly call”, the author is expressing a common NT theme describing a deep theological connection which goes well beyond the superficiality of many (most) secular relationships. This phrase means and is translated in many places as “saints” – those set apart for service to God. It does not imply that they are holy in and of themselves, but are instead consecrated, set apart and sanctified. They are brought together as brothers (children of God) because they share in “the heavenly call”.

The origin of this “call” is of course, God. Paul, in II Tim. 1:8-9 expresses that call memorably; and in Phil. 3:12-14, identifies it as “the upward call”, the reward for which he presses on to acquire, and in Rom. 8:28-30, Paul places the call in the “*ordo salutis*”, as “the call according to God’s purpose”, and those alone who are predestined are “called”. This is referring to the effectual call, the call that will be responded to, not the general call of the gospel, but a call that will get the attention of all who have “ears to hear” and hearts that have been prepared to receive it, and they will respond to it.

The Apostle

This designation of Christ as “apostle” is without parallel in the NT.ⁱ Although the phrasing is unique, the concept is not obscure in the least. “Apostle” means one who is sent, and the fact that Jesus was sent by the Father is a major theme in the NT, and in fact, John’s gospel, Jesus describes Himself as having been sent into the world by His Father many times (Jn. 3:17,34; 5:36ff; 6:29,57; 7:29; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3,18; 20:21).ⁱⁱ

“As God sent Moses to deliver His people from Egypt (Ex. 3:10); Jesus, as God’s final and definitive messenger [God’s final Word] (cf. 1:1-2) is the great deliverer of the Lord’s people.”ⁱⁱⁱ

The High Priest of Our Confession

The first mention of Jesus as high priest was in 2:17, and now that concept is repeated here in connection with Jesus’ apostleship, and the truth of His high priesthood will grow into a major theme throughout the book of Hebrews, becoming especially prevalent in chapters 7-10.

We will see as we delve farther into Hebrews that Jesus' priesthood is one dissimilar to the OT Aaronic priesthood, as the author connects it instead to Melchizedek, and with the connection to Moses and being sent here, coupled with Aaron as the first high priest, it will become apparent in Hebrews that His priesthood is much loftier, eternal and effective. Of course, one of the reasons He came as that 'apostle' was so that as high priest He could give His own life as a sacrifice for many.

But the focus here in this passage is not the nature of His high priesthood, but rather the superiority of His glory over that of Moses, and therefore, His earthly ministry, not His heavenly one. This is made clear by the tense of the descriptions: (v.2) "was faithful to Him who appointed Him"; (v.3) "has been counted worthy"; which are surely talking about what He did on earth.

The phrase, "our confessions", is somewhat ambiguous and could mean the body of the faith we proclaim – i.e. as in Jude 3 – "*the faith once delivered to the saints*", or it is a creedal reference, although Hebrews predates all the known creeds of Christendom by many decades.

v. 2 - Jesus, our apostle and high priest, faithfully carried out His mission God appointed Him to perform. We see evidence of that in JN 17:4,26 (+ cf. JN 12:49-50; 14:10) and His cry from the cross, JN 19:30 – "It is finished!". Later on in Hebrews 10:7-9, the words of Psalm 40:8 are attributed to Christ. Since He was utterly faithful to the Father, that gives us assurance that He is worthy of our trust and confidence. In fact, Rev. 5:9-10 unequivocally proves it.

This verse continues with an analogy by use of the connector, "just as", which seems to be an allusion to Num. 12:7. The context of that passage is the challenge to Moses' leadership by both Aaron and Miriam because he had married a Cushite woman. The point of the allusion to this verse in Hebrews is that He was faithful "in all God's house". This refers to the scope of his stewardship – over the family of Israel. Moses fulfilled his appointment by God to bring His people out of bondage and to lead them to God's promised land – wilderness wanderings notwithstanding, and often under the stress of the disrespect and open rebellion sometimes of the people he led.

The Builder of the House

vv. 3-6a

Just because Jesus and Moses have similarities in the working out of their stewardships or missions, we must not conclude that they are equals. This is expressed here by verse 3. This concept may have its source in a number of OT prophetic passages, like: Zech. 6:12; I Chron. 17:11-14, as well as occasional mentions in the NT confirm that the house or temple Jesus is building stone by stone, with Himself as chief cornerstone is His people (i.e. the Church). Note I Peter 2:4-8; Eph. 2:19-21 & I Cor. 6:19-20. He redeemed us and continues to build His church.

The result of the difference expressed in this verse is that Moses was faithful and fulfilled the role God had purposed for him, but Jesus is worthy of much more glory and honour than Moses because of who He is and what He accomplished.

V. 4 is in parentheses, and it makes sense that way. Although this verse may seem somewhat cryptic, the explanation of it is rather simple. V. 4a is explanatory and indisputable – very house is built by someone, and 4b corrects any possible conclusion that what is being discussed here is about many competitive builders. If we are talking just about physical ‘houses’, there are a lot of builders, but they do so only in some secondary sense, building with the substance that the primary builder has provided – i.e. – God, who is the “builder of all things” cf. Rom. 11:33-36; Col. 1:15-18.

With the parenthetical statement out of the way, vv. 5-6, the contrast between Jesus and Moses continues, and the contrast hinges on two words, “in” and “over”. Moses, as a servant was faithful in God’s house (Num. 12:7), but Jesus, as the Son, is faithful over the house, and thus incidentally, over Moses. IOW, it’s His house! – cf. Heb. 11:26.

Jesus’ servanthood was without flaw or blemish, without shortcoming; without sin; and with eternal purpose. Moses fulfilled his servanthood and moved off of the scene, stopped by physical death, but Jesus continues to serve and reign, ever-living to make intercession for us. Ahead, in Hebrews 10:21, Jesus is said to be “a great high priest over the house of God”. Philip Hughes makes this helpful comment;

“His faithfulness is that of a servant, his authority that of a son. In other words, he displays himself in a double capacity, as servant and as sovereign: servant in his mediatorial office which involved him to the full in the service of the household, and sovereign by reason both of his eternal Sonship and of the enthronement that followed his humiliation, and as such the ruler over the household. He is the promised Son on whose shoulders the government rests (Isa. 9:6). Zechariah’s prophecy of the Branch (Zech. 6:12) affirms not only that he will build the temple of the Lord but also that he “shall bear royal honor and shall sit and rule upon his throne.” In the apostolic proclamation it is he, the risen and glorified Lord, who has been appointed “supreme head to the church” (Eph. 1:22 NEB; cf. Eph. 5:23; Col. 1:18). His Sonship is the ground of his authority. The distinction, then, between Moses as servant in God’s household and Christ as Son over it is one of absolute significance.”^{iv}

In v. 5, the author also adds this of Moses, “*to testify to the things that were to be spoken later*”. Surely, this means that part of Moses’ role as servant in God’s house was to point forward in time to the fulfillment of God’s purposes, of which he was merely an important stepping stone. He was pointing to the incomparable Christ yet to come. This is expressed in Deut. 18:15-19, and a NT parallel of this sentiment can be found in John the Baptist’s words in MT. 3:11-12.

Christ is the true focus of Moses' ministry, and this, too, is made plain by Jesus' words in JN 5:45-47: *"Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote of Me. But if you will not believe his writings, how will you believe My words?"* And in Acts 10:43, Peter says, *"To Him all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name."*

We Are His House If...

v. 6b

Here in this second half of v. 6, we find an exhortation which is not as strong perhaps as a full warning passage, yet it carries the implication that an obligation has been given to all who are true believers to persevere or (implied) risk not being part of the house the author has been referring to since v. 3. Hughes again supplies a comment, drawing on F.F. Bruce's wisdom:

"As so frequently in this epistle, however, the status of the Christian is coupled with an admonitory proviso: we are God's house if, on condition that, we hold fast our confidence and pride in our hope. This is entirely in line with the teaching of Christ, who declared" "If you continue in My Word, you are truly My disciples" (JN 8:31). FF Bruce remarks on the "repeated insistence" of our epistle "on the fact that continuance in the Christian life is the test of reality"; and he adds that "the doctrine of the final perseverance of the saints has as its corollary the sanguinary teaching that the saints are the people who persevere to the end."^v

Obedience has always brought blessing, while unfaithfulness, unbelief and apostasy leads to judgment – sometimes physical (as in some discipline) or spiritual – if allowed to remain in one's life. In fact, what follows this section (3:7-19) illustrates what occurs when people are disobedient, and in fact, in vv. 18-19, disobedience is equated with unbelief.

This idea of "conditional security or assurance" will keep appearing throughout Hebrews, especially in the warning passages, and is found throughout the NT as well. It does not take long for the author to mention it again – note [3:14](#) and [12:14](#). The following lengthy citation of Philip Hughes makes a lot of sense in this regard:

"It must not be imagined that our author is speaking only theoretically rather than addressing himself to the realities of the situation. His perception of the perilous state of this particular community was what impelled him to undertake the writing of this epistle. His readers, he discerns, are in danger of wavering under the influence of strange ideas and hostile pressures. Like Christians in every age, they are face to face with perplexities and temptations. They are exhorted accordingly not to weaken and retire from the struggle, and reminded that only if they hold fast are they "God's house." Nor does an admonition of this kind conflict with the dominical and apostolic teaching that the Christian's eternal security is dependent not on himself but on Christ and His merits alone (cf. JN 5:24; 6:37; 10:27-29; Acts 2:47; Rom. 11:6f; I Cor. 1:26ff; 2 Cor. 5:18ff; Eph. 2:8-10). But it does mean that a man whose profession of faith is contradicted by the quality of his life should examine himself to see whether he is a Christian at all (2 Cor. 13:5). Security in

Christ does not absolve one from personal responsibility; quite the contrary, for the regenerate man is under total obligation to God. Seriousness in believing should manifest itself in seriousness concerning doctrine and conduct. And this is applicable to communities as well as individuals; hence the incitements to the seven churches of the Apocalypse to overcome, to be faithful unto death, and to hold fast until Christ comes (Rev. 2:7,11,17,25f.; 3:5, 11f., 21).”^{vi}

This verse, and this section ends up by referring to our “boasting in our hope”. Not only do we need to hold fast our confidence but also our boasting in our hope. The NET Bible translates this verse; “*We are of His house, if in fact we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope we take pride in.*” remember the first recipients of this letter – in danger of walking away from Christ and returning to Judaism? If we boast in our hope, then we are not ashamed of it – as Paul famously states in Rom. 1:16-17. We must never be ashamed of the gospel. Recall Jesus’ words from MK 8:38 (par. MT 10:32-33).

ⁱ Philip E. Hughes, Hebrews p. 126

ⁱⁱ IBID, p. 127

ⁱⁱⁱ Thomas Schreiner, Hebrews, p. 114

^{iv} Hughes, p. 135

^v Hughes, p. 138

^{vi} IBID, p. 138-139