

Hebrews 3:1-6
Greater Than Moses

Therefore, holy brothers,^[a] you who share in ^(A)a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, ^(B)the apostle and high priest of our confession,² who was faithful to him who appointed him, ^(C)just as Moses also was faithful in all God's^[b] house.³ 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.⁴ (For every house is built by someone, but ^(D)the builder of all things is God.)⁵ ^(E)Now Moses was faithful in all God's house ^(F)as a servant, ^(G)to testify to the things that were to be spoken later,⁶ but Christ is faithful over God's house as ^(H)a son. And ^(I)we are his house if indeed we ^(J)hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

Chapter 3, verse 1, introduces the second major section in the Book of Hebrews. The first section, 1:1 – 2:18, was a revelation of the dignity of the Son of God and of his full humanity, which qualified him to be a merciful and faithful high priest so he could die for the sins of his people. The major teaching of this second section is the priestly character of the divine Son. This subject was introduced in 2:17, where Jesus is described as a “merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God.” This first major section contains within it an exhortation or warning passage 2:1-4,

-that we must not neglect this great salvation that God has provided in his Son.

Thus we see a pattern that is followed throughout the Book of Hebrews, and that is a carefully constructed sermon that contains sections of exposition, or teaching, interspersed with appropriate passages of exhortation or warnings. This book was no doubt carefully planned and thought about before the writer took up his pen to write the final draft which became the Letter to the Hebrews.

The writer then deals, in reverse order, with these two great themes regarding our Lord Jesus Christ: he is faithful and he is merciful. In the passage we will be considering today, chapter 3, verses 1-6, we see the faithfulness of Jesus to God, and this becomes the basis for the remainder of chapter 3 and chapter 4 which is an exhortation for

the hearers of this letter to be faithful to God also. Not only they, but we too, have an obligation to be faithful to God.

As we begin this second major section of the book of Hebrews, and in particular these first 6 verses of chapter 3, we see that the writer outlines for us readers the fact that Jesus is superior to Moses. So, we must now ask, “Why as it necessary to show that Jesus is superior to Moses, after having just shown that he is superior to angels? Wouldn’t this have been enough?”

To answer this question, we should keep in mind that Moses was a supremely important OT figure for the Jews. He was 2nd in importance only to Yahweh himself.

And we should realize that throughout the Book of Hebrews, Jesus and the New Covenant are compared and contrasted with the Mosaic era, the Mosaic covenant, and the Mosaic provisions for worship. In fact, we see a hint of this in the opening verses of the Book, where Jesus, the culminating and final prophet of God, is declared to have superseded all the previous prophets, of whom Moses would have been the chief. So throughout the Book of Hebrews, there is really a constant comparison and contrast between the religious system instituted by Moses and that which was instituted by Christ.

The Jews high esteem for Moses was not unfounded. Num. 12:6-8 is a key passage that demonstrates the unique position held by Moses among all the OT prophets:

And he said, “Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him ^(A)in a vision; I speak with him ^(B)in a dream. ⁷ Not so with ^(C)my servant Moses. ^(D)He is faithful in all my house. ⁸ With him I speak ^(E)mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in ^(F)riddles, and he beholds ^(G)the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?”

This particular passage is, in fact, alluded to in Hebrews 3, in verses 2 and 5.

You see, it was Moses to whom God had spoken most directly and personally above all the OT Prophets. So our writer here has to show

his readers that although Moses was the greatest of the OT prophets and an agent of mediation to be listened to, heeded, and respected under the Old Covenant, he nonetheless is not as great as Jesus because Jesus holds a higher rank than does Moses. Jesus is, in fact, the Son of God, while Moses is a servant – yes, a great servant, the most humble of all men on earth – but still a servant, and not the Son.

According to the research done by William Lane, in some of the Jewish communities of the Diaspora (scattering) of the 1st century, there was the belief that Moses was even superior to the angels as an agent of mediation between God and men. So, assuming there is some truth to this, it is perfectly natural that the writer to the Hebrews would first of all explain Jesus' superiority to the angels, and then secondly his superiority to Moses, which we see here.

V. 1 - Therefore, holy brothers,^[a] you who share in ^(A)a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, ^(B)the apostle and high priest of our confession,

We should take note here, that we have a “therefore.” What this means is that because of what has already been said about Jesus, we should consider him. That is, because of the dignity of his person, because of his incarnation, because of his atoning death for our sins, and because of faithful high priestly ministry, we should consider him. What this word “consider” means is to pause and meditate and ponder – not rush through like grabbing a McDonald’s sandwich but take a long and leisurely 6 course French meal that takes several hours to savor and enjoy.

Notice that the writer addresses them as “holy brothers” What does this mean? Does this just mean that they are fellow Jews, which is the way sometimes the word “brothers” is used in the NT in certain situations? Well, they are certainly Jews, but they are more than just Jews after the flesh, more than just ethnic Jews. These people to whom he is writing are people who “share in a heavenly calling.” Thus they are Christians.

The writer exhorts these believers, these Christians, to take to heart most seriously the person of Jesus – and he designates him as the

“apostle and high priest of our confession.” The word “confession” is not used lightly here but it refers to the core of Christian belief that is fundamental and foundational to our religion. What is the very core of our confession? If we look over at 4:14 we see that it is that Jesus is *the Son of God*. This ties in with the statement in 3:6 that Jesus is the Son.

What does this phrase mean, that Jesus is the “apostle and high priest” of our confession. For one thing, it is a summary of all that has been said so far about Jesus – that he is the one whom God sent as the final messenger and the mediator between God and men, and the redeemer of God’s people.

Interestingly, William Lane states that this two-fold description of Jesus could also be applied to Moses. Moses was a sent representative of God who was called and appointed by God to represent Yahweh at Pharaoh’s court.

He is in a real sense also a priest. He is a Levite, from whom come all the priests, including the first high priest, who was Aaron, his brother. Also his privileged access to God places him in a priestly role. He also ministered sacrificial offerings of young bulls at an altar at the foot of the mountain (Exo 24: 4-8).

So there seems to be a strong parallelism between Moses and Jesus, in that both, in a certain sense, though not in exactly the same sense, could be called apostles and priests.

The thrust of the writer’s argument here in 3:1-6 turns on the fact that Jesus is a Son over God’s house, while Moses is a servant in God’s house. Jesus’ ministry as a faithful Son over God’s house is built on at least a couple of relevant OT passages:

1 Sam 2:35 - (A)And I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in my heart and in my mind. (B)And I will build him a sure house, and he shall go in and out before (C)my anointed forever. (through Eli..)

1 Chron. 17:13-14 - ¹³ (A) I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. I will not take my steadfast love from him, ^(B) as I took it from him who was before you, ¹⁴ but I will confirm him in my house and in my kingdom forever, and his throne shall be established forever.’” (through Nathan regarding David’s descendant) The LXX, which the writer would have been using, translates this “I will make him faithful in my house.”

Now in Psalm 99:6 we see:

Moses and Aaron were among his ^(B) priests,
Samuel also was among those who ^(C) called upon his name.

Thus Jesus is the one who fulfills these ancient promises.

Now 3:1-6 speaks much of faithfulness – faithfulness both on the part of Moses and of Jesus. But a key distinction here is that a servant is required to be faithful – it is his job. But a Son is faithful by a higher motivation – because of love for his father.

What is the basis of the difference between Moses the servant, and Jesus the Son? It is the appointment, the ordination, of God. There is a great difference between Jesus and Moses. Jesus is here called the builder of the house – and a builder receives more glory than the house. It is the builder who conceives and designs the house and carries out the plans for having it built. The house is sort of passive - it falls in place as the builders put in together. So is the great distinction between Moses and Jesus. And it is a great difference: the house versus the builder. It is the latter who receives more glory than the former. It is the builder who is the great architect and executer of the plan to construct the house. The house itself, as here referring to Moses, cannot compare with the great intelligent design of the architect.

Well, the writer wastes no time in making a practical application here, as he is discussing the faithfulness of both Moses and Jesus. He says in verse 6:

And ^(I) we are his house if indeed we ^(J) hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

So, the readers, the recipients of this letter – also have a calling and obligation to faithfulness. If they, too, are a part of God’s house, they must hold fast their confidence and hope. This thought then launches

the writer into the long section which follows, 3:7-4:14, which is a long exhortation and warning.

Summary:

This passage is of key importance for the development of this lengthy sermon which we call the Book of Hebrews.

The key truth there that is the strength of the argument revolves around Christology – the identification of the nature of the Son. He is the exalted Son of God and is therefore meritorious of much greater glory than Moses the servant. For one thing, the whole concept of priesthood is involved here.

In 2:17 we read that Jesus has become “a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God.”

And this whole concept of priesthood is not laid aside but dealt with immediately as we see in the opening verse of chapter 3: “...Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession.” Although Moses was indeed faithful to the calling God appointed him, by his very nature he was a servant, and not the Son. He is likened to the difference between a house and its builder. Jesus is the builder, the architect, and Moses is merely the house, that which is constructed by the builder.

Moses was indeed venerated by his people and because of their high esteem for this great leader and prophet and priest, it was not so easy to dislodge them from their admiration and devotion to Moses. After all, he was the one through whom God gave the Law which distinguished them as set apart from all the other peoples of the earth, as God’s holy people.

So the writer here has to educate his readers, he has to help them understand, that though Moses was a great leader, Jesus is far greater – and he is greater because of his intrinsic nature – he is the divine Son, the final Word from God, the heir of all things, the creator of the universe, the outshining of the glory of God as rays come from the sun, he is the sustainer of all things, and he is the one who made purification for our sins.

This exposition was crucial for clearing up any confusion in the minds of the hearers as to the relationship between Moses and Jesus. Having introduced

the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ, the writer will subsequently seek with all his intellectual and Biblical might to persuade these Christians to be faithful to Jesus Christ, not to return to Judaism, not to return to a lesser and incomplete revelation, but to cling to and embrace the full and complete revelation of the exalted Son who came to fulfill the Law and prophets. Moses was a precursor and in many ways a foreshadowing of the fulfillment who would come – the divine Son, the faithful Son, the apostle and high priest of our confession.

Let us, too, embrace him, cling to him, and confess him through all our days, and to our generation. Amen.

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