

## STUDY ELEVEN

# The Person of Christ—6

### THE HIGH PRIEST

Closely related to the servant concept is that of the High Priest. This is seen in such incarnational elements as in Hebrews 2:14, 17 which speaks of true incarnation being necessary for his being a High Priest. The use of Psalm 110 in relation to the Messiah makes it clear that Messiah is also High Priest (after the order of Melchizedek). The significance of his being High Priest and *the* High Priest, superseding all priesthoods previous to his, really must be seen in the light of the thesis of the Epistle to the Hebrews, namely that all prior cultus has been superseded by the gospel, the new covenant, by Christ. There is no aid, no representation, no efficacious sacrifice (all before were shadows of that 'to come', i.e. come in Christ), no mediation apart from Christ. This Priest has offered the perfect sacrifice (10:10–14), has passed into the heavens (9:24) to appear for us, to exercise an unchangeable priesthood and to intercede for us, forever (Heb. 7:24, 25). He is not only Priest but King–Priest (Ps. 110:1–4; cf. Heb. 5:5–6; 7:17; 8:1; etc.) and, as such, also the Son (Heb. 5:5ff.).

If this concept of Priest were simply figurative or speculatively attractive, that would be one thing. However, the writer of the Hebrews is convinced of an eternal and divine cultus which is the reality, thus all other 'comparative religions' become automatically null and void, including that of the Old Testament economy, which was a 'shadow of things to come'. This element of Christology, then, is extremely valuable and, as the others, indispensable to salvation.

The fact that Jesus quoted Psalm 110 and undoubtedly related it to himself (see Matt. 22:41ff.) makes it significant. When the writer of Hebrews uses the phrase 'to bear the sins of many' (Heb. 9:28), this is a direct reference to Isaiah 53:12, thus linking Messiah-King-Priest with the Servant of the Lord who 'offered up himself' (Heb. 7:27). The various elements of Christology cannot be divorced one from the other.

### THE WORD

The description of the 'Word' in John 1:1f. undoubtedly speaks of an Eternal Being. It speaks of pre-existence. It speaks of this Word as the Creative Word. Then (1:14) John says 'the Word became flesh'. Thus the Word incarnate is a Person. The concept of *Logos* did not begin with John. The personified concept of Wisdom in Proverbs 8 and the creative and revelatory character of the Word (Ps. 33:6; Isa. 55:10f.; 11:4), with the concept of 'the Word of the Lord said' of the Rabbinic understanding (e.g. Gen. 3:9), and also the personified idea of law in Deuteronomy 30:11-14 (cf. Isa. 2:3) shows that John's *Logos* is not an idea of John. The Word that is the Son, is

born; comparing John 1:14 and 1:18. A similar thought is in Hebrews 1:1–3 where He speaks (in this epoch) by the Son. As the utterance (Word) of God calls creation into existence (Gen. 1:1f.), so the Word that is enfleshed speaks of God in all its actions. It declares the Father. Cullmann says:

One cannot say . . . (God was with the word), because the Logos is God himself in so far as God speaks and reveals himself. The Logos is God in his revelation. Thus the third phrase of the prologue can actually proclaim . . . (and the Word was God).<sup>1</sup>

When Thomas finally says, ‘My Lord and my God!’ he is acknowledging the deity of the Word. The Word, however, is God always communicating or revealing Himself.

Other Scriptures which relate to the creative and sustaining attributes of the Word, such as in 1 Corinthians 8:6, Colossians 1:16, Revelation 3:14, and Hebrews 1:2, are not described there specifically as attributes of the Word, but of the Son as Jesus Christ the Lord. It is as the Word, however, as in John 1:14, 18 that he is equated with the Son. In John, as in other New Testament writings, it is the Son who reveals the glory of God, the Word who describes or reveals the Father.

### THE PROPHET

In our section on ‘Old Testament Intimations’ we discussed the idea of the prophet to come who would be like Moses (Deut. 18:15ff.). There is no doubt that Jesus was thought of as a prophet (Luke 7:16; cf. Matt. 16:14;

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<sup>1</sup> Oscar Cullman, *The Christology of the New Testament*, p. 265.

21:46), and not only as a prophet but ‘a great prophet’. At the same time John the Baptist is looked upon as a great prophet, for in Luke 7:28 Jesus says there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist. Undoubtedly Jesus pointed to John as ‘Elijah . . . already come’ (Mark 9:11ff.; Matt. 17:10ff.), but it would seem at the same time that ‘greater than a prophet’ means John is ‘the prophet’ of Deuteronomy 18:15ff. If this is so then it means: (i) that John’s words must be heeded under deadly peril of rejection; and (ii) that there can be no prophet greater than John—not even Jesus. (Notice in Luke 7:16–19 that John, on hearing that Jesus is ‘a prophet’, seems to doubt the ministry of Jesus as being that of Messiah.) John has already been called ‘the prophet of the Most High’ (Luke 1:76). Yet John denies he is Christ (John 1:20; cf. Luke 3:15f.; John 3:28) as he seems to have been thought to be. He also denies he is Elijah and ‘that prophet’, this latter being the prophet of Deuteronomy 18:15ff. He makes it clear here and elsewhere that he is subordinate and inferior to Jesus, so that no matter how great he is as a prophet, Jesus is greater. It is obvious that the prophet of Deuteronomy 18:15 is greater even than John, which is possibly what Jesus is inferring in Luke 7:26–28.

In the transfiguration a voice is heard: ‘This is my beloved [or elect] Son; hear him!’ (AV). The ‘hear him’ almost obviously refers to the prophet of Deuteronomy 18. It is following this that the disciples debate Elijah *redivivus* (cf. Matt. 17:10–13) and Jesus points out that he has come in John the Baptist. This then makes Jesus ‘that prophet’. The moment we think of him being as Moses (cf. Heb. 3:2f.) the idea of the Servant reappears, and indeed in Mark 9:12 the Son of man (as the Suffering Servant—cf. Mark 8:31) ‘must suffer many things’, in

accordance with Isaiah 53. In Matthew 21:10–11 he is called ‘the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee’, probably meaning he is the prophet of the end time, since he is seen here as the King, or the Messianic One, the Son of David.

Finally, in Acts 3:22 (cf. 7:37) it is clear that the apostles considered Deuteronomy 18:15 fulfilled in Jesus, and for this reason they link him (3:26) with the Son of God. The passage (3:19–26) shows the serious nature of refusing this (ordained) prophet of God. In this passage, Peter places the prophet in the ‘end time’, and actually speaks of the universal blessing he will bring in accordance with the Abrahamic Covenant, another interesting link with the (now) universal prophet.

THE PERSON OF CHRIST