

The Superiority of Christ

Week 44: October 29-November 4 — *Hebrews 1:1-8:2*

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Helpful Resources

Who Is the Author of *Hebrews*? (p.63)

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

Imagine someone trying to convince you to abandon Christianity for another religion — Hinduism, Buddhism, or Islam. What would it take to persuade you that another religion is superior to yours? Would you be skeptical, stubborn, even resistant? Of course. In essence, that was what the writer of *Hebrews* was trying to accomplish. The Jews had 4000 years of history in their scriptures (Old Testament). They had been under the Abrahamic covenant for 2000 years and the Mosaic Law for 1500 years. Were they supposed to turn their backs on all of that for this new, persecuted religion called Christianity?

But there's more. Rather than replacing Judaism with Christianity, the writer explained that Christianity was (and is) the fulfillment or completion of Judaism. In other words, Jesus was the Messiah who was promised long ago. So then, the writer was not trying to convince the Jews to leave Judaism but to see that the Messiah had arrived, and that, in Him, the Judaist rituals and regulations had ceased. Christ, who is the Messiah, was Superior to all those imperfect people and practices that had come before Him. These Old Testament shadows were fulfilled with the substance — Christ (*Heb. 8:5*). In this review, let's reconsider the arguments for Jesus, the superior Messiah.

- The Shadows and the Substance

1. **Shadow 1 — The Prophets** (*Heb. 1:1-3*): Israel had many prophets. God sent them to tell the Israelites His words, to expose their sins, and to warn them of judgment. Prophets also foretold of the coming Messiah, the Promised One (*Gen. 3:15*), who would take away their sins, set up a kingdom, and defeat their enemies.

Substance: Jesus is the Messiah who was to come, the Son of God. Since He is the fulfillment of the prophecies, Jesus is greater than any of the Old Testament prophets.

2. **Shadow 2 — The Angels** (*Heb. 1:4-2:18*): Angels are held in high esteem by the Jews because of their prominent roles in the Old Testament. As heavenly messengers of God, their position and messages carry a lot of weight with the people of Israel.

Substance: While angels are heavenly messengers with great responsibilities, they are created beings. As Creator, Christ's position and message are superior to the angels.

3. **Shadow 3 — Moses** (*Heb. 3:1-19*): Moses was, indeed, the greatest Old Testament leader of Israel, delivering the people from slavery, providing the law, and doing miracles.

Substance: Moses spoke of a greater prophet to come (*Deut. 18:15*). As great as Moses was, his ministry was imperfect and incomplete. What Moses could not do, Christ did.

4. **Shadow 4 — Joshua and the Promised Land (4:1-13):** Joshua led the people of Israel into the Promised Land (Canaan), to give them rest from their wandering. However, that rest was imperfect. With the presence of sin, perfect rest is impossible on earth.

Substance: Jesus paid the penalty for sin with His sacrifice. Therefore, He can grant us perfect peace with God, which we will one day enjoy in His presence in heaven. Christ will also defeat His enemies one day and establish perfect peace and rest on earth.

5. **Shadow 5 — The High Priest (Heb. 4:14-5:11):** The High Priest is the highest position in Judaism. He represented the people before God in the Holy of Holies and atoned for their sins. He was the only one who could step behind the inner veil into God's presence.

Substance: Levitical priests did have a high position, but they were still sinful men, and their animal sacrifices were imperfect and temporary. Jesus' sacrifice was perfect (sinless). He tore the veil and afforded us the privilege of approaching God's presence. We can go before God with confidence because of Christ's priestly work.

6. **Shadow 6 — Aaron's Lineage (Heb. 7:1-8:2):** God named Aaron as the first High Priest. Therefore, all successive priests come from his descendants.

Substance: Jesus, too, is our Great High Priest, but His lineage is according to Melchizedek's, not Aaron's. Since Melchizedek existed before Aaron, Christ's priesthood is superior to Aaron's; and since Melchizedek still lives, Christ's priesthood is everlasting. Of course, Melchizedek was an Old Testament appearance (theophany) of Christ.

- Apostasy

As Jews considered what the writer of *Hebrews* had to say, they had to decide either to accept Christ for who He is and what He's done or abandon Christ and return to the rituals and regulations of the Judaist system. He begged them to "pay much closer attention to what they had heard, so that they would not drift away" (2:1). For if they turned their back on Christ and returned to the imperfect Judaist system for salvation, they would not escape God's judgment (2:3). Thus, the writer challenged the Jews not to be like their forefathers, stubborn and unbelieving, for they lost it all, never entering the Promised Land (3:12-19).

- Press On to Maturity

The writer of *Hebrews* was disappointed in the Jews, for not seeing Christ as the fulfillment of the promises God had made (5:12-6:2). He was also frustrated with their spiritual apathy and immaturity. They were not ready for "solid food" but remained shallow in their faith and understanding. May we not repeat their mistakes but strive to "press on to maturity" (6:1).

The Bottom Line

As the substance of all Old Testament shadows (types), Jesus's ministry is superior to them all.

Questions to Consider

1. So far in our study of *Hebrews*, what have you found most encouraging or challenging?
2. Take a minute to read *Luke 24:1-35*. What do you suppose Jesus shared that day?
3. Had you understood all the Old Testament shadows before this study? Recognize that there are many others. Make an effort to press on to maturity and learn more!