

Christmas: The Superiority of Jesus Christ

1. Introduction

In our recent studies we have researched the two competing systems of biblical analysis: the allegorical approach which imputes the preconceived opinions of the interpreter to the Scripture versus the literal-grammatical-historical approach which allows the Scripture to speak to the interpreter.

Our theology is the result of subscription to the latter system which we have documented as the one most utilized by the early church fathers prior to the late fourth and early fifth centuries.

The science of biblical interpretation is called hermeneutics, a word whose origin goes back to the Lord's discussion with Cleopas and a second disciple on the Emmaus Road. In Luke 24:27 we read, "Beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, Jesus explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures."

The word "explained" is **διερμηνεύω** (*diermēneúō*). It is a compound made up of the prefix, **διά-**, *dia-* which intensifies the following verb, **ἐρμηνεύω**, *hermēneúō*, and is translated into English Bibles as "expounded" and "explained." In other words, the Lord "interpreted" the Old Testament Scripture as prophetic of Him and His involvement throughout human history with emphasis on the First Advent, His ministry, passion, crucifixion, and resurrection.

Jesus Christ has been revealed to mankind from the very beginning of human history, but this revelation has been progressive. As God informed men of His plan He did so in increments and with each increment more information was disclosed. These increments are known as dispensations.

It therefore is logical to conclude that if God reveals His plan to man incrementally then the spiritual life of each succeeding dispensation is more sophisticated than the one which precedes it. There are six of these dispensations: (1) the age of the Gentiles when there was no written canon of Scripture, (2) the age of Israel during which the Torah and the remainder of the Old Testament canon was revealed, (3) the age of Christ or the Incarnation during which time He demonstrated and executed a new and superior spiritual life, (4) the age of the Church in which believers inherit from Christ this superior spiritual life the Lord utilized during the incarnation, (5) the age of the Tribulation, a seven year period between the age of the Church and the Second Advent, and (6) the age of the Millennium, a 1,000 year period of world peace and prosperity under the benevolent dictatorship of Jesus Christ whose global government will be based in Jerusalem.

Today we will demonstrate from Scripture that the spiritual life utilized by our Lord during His Incarnation and inherited by believers in the Church Age is superior to all other systems before it. And we will do so by demonstrating that Jesus Christ is superior.

The book of Hebrews will be the center of our study. It is an epistle directed to Jewish Christians of the first century who became confused regarding the new requirements for the spiritual life of the new dispensation of the Church.

Having been taught the spiritual life of Israel and having become accustomed to a form of worship that emphasized ritual and symbolism these Christian Jews needed direction on how to break away from the legalism that ritual-based religions usually inspire.

In order to do this the writer of Hebrews is led to demonstrate to these Jewish believers that the new system and its Founder are superior to the old ritual and its prophets.

Consequently, if the book of Hebrews could be characterized by one word it would be:

κρείττων, *kreíttōn* “better, more prominent, more advantageous, greater, superior.”

We have recently studied the various dialects of ancient Greece, and this word is a good one to reveal the different spellings among them although their definitions remain the same.

Old Attic: κρείσσων, *kreíssōn*; later Attic: κρείττων, *kreíttōn*, lonic: κρέσσων, *kréssōn*; Doric: κάρρων, *kárrōn*; and Cretan: κάπτων, *kártōn*.

Stronger and mightier in battle; used frequently as a comparative to ἀγαθός, *agathós*: good; better in point of rank; more powerful; surpassing; having control over; more excellent; superior.¹

The Koine Greek of the *Letter of Hebrews* is consistent in using the later Attic spelling of **κρείττων] (*kreíttōn*)**. All of these definitions adequately describe the elevated position believers in the Church Age have over those of the age of Israel.

The English word we will use to define ***kreíttōn*** in our translations is “superior”: “The Church Age is superior to the dispensation of Israel because its Pioneer is Superior to the prophets, angels, & Levitical priests.”

Hebrews 1:1 In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets ...

¹ Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*. 9th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 993.

1. A prophet is one who is divinely inspired to communicate God’s will to his people, and to disclose the future to them.
2. The prophets of Israel wrote under the ministry of the Holy Spirit which was designed for that dispensation known as enduement. It was a temporary ministry granted to select men and retained only so long as divine guidance was needed to accomplish the given objective.
3. This is in contrast to the Holy Spirit’s permanent indwelling in the Church Age and the availability of His filling ministry to those who maintain spirituality by means of confession of sin to the Father.

Hebrews 1:1a In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,

1. “Many times,” indicates the fact that the Old Testament canon was developed over a period of about 1,000 years.
2. “In various ways” indicates that God utilized several processes in communicating His Word to the prophets: (1) direct communication from God to the prophet; (2) Theophanies (the Lord’s appearance as a man, an angel, or a phenomenon of nature, e.g., the burning bush, the pillar of fire by night, or the cloud by day), (3) angelic revelation, (4) visions (while awake), and (5) dreams (while asleep).
3. “In the past” refers to the fact that there has been a previous revelation from God to men.
4. This original set of revelations is not to be tossed aside but it is to give way to new mandates found in the New Testament.

Hebrews 1:1a In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ...

5. How God speaks to us now is the subject of verse 2.

Hebrews 1:2a but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, ... (NIV)

1. This phrase refers to Jesus Christ in hypostatic union during the Incarnation which is documented in the four Gospels.
2. During the Lord’s Incarnation, which is actually a dispensation in itself, Jesus demonstrated the new playing rules for the coming dispensation of the Church.

3. Thus, it can be seen that for the Church Age, God speaks to us not through prophets but through His Son.
4. The Son of God is presented as superior to the prophets of God.

Hebrews 1:2a but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son whom He appointed heir of all things ...

1. Jesus Christ is the heir of God’s eternal kingdom. He will reign over the earth during the Millennium and over the new heavens and new earth during the eternal state.
2. Believers in the Church Age are members of God’s royal family and become joint heirs with Christ. What He inherits, we inherit:

Romans 8:16 The Holy Spirit testifies with our human spirit that we are God’s children.

v. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ... (EXT)

3. In the future, Jesus Christ as the heir to David’s throne will rule over a perfect earth and a glorified humanity.

Hebrews 1:2 but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He [God the Father] made the universe.

1. The word “universe” is a poor translation. Jesus Christ created the universe which is implied in the next verse. The Greek word here is **αἰών, aiōn** and means “ages” and indicates that God arranged history to coordinate with the dispensations which He designed.
2. We now have two verses:

Hebrews 1:1 In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,

v. 2 but in the Church Age He has spoken to us by His Son whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom He [God the Father] designed the dispensations.

v. 3 The Son is the radiance of God’s glory ... (NIV)

1. The word “radiance” is **ἀπαύγασμα (apaúgasma)** and means “brightness” and refers to light which emanates from a luminous body.

2. During human history from the Exodus to the Millennium, there has always been a Tabernacle or a Temple to represent the presence of God.
3. In the dispensation of Israel, it was first the Tabernacle in the wilderness and later a number of temples in Jerusalem.
4. In the Church Age, it is the believer in Jesus Christ whose body becomes the temple for the indwelling of Christ, the Shekinah Glory.
5. When Jesus Christ as the God of Israel was present in the Tabernacle there appeared over the Holy of Holies a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.
6. The presence of the Lord in the Tabernacle was referred to by the Jews as the *Shekinah* Glory.
7. “*Shekinah*” comes from the Hebrew word שְׁכִינָה (*shekinah*) and means, “that which dwells.”
8. The term *Shekinah* Glory referred to the brightness which emanated from the Holy of Holies, the dwelling place of God. Thus, this term became a title for Jesus Christ as the God of Israel.
9. The Lord is presented as the shining forth of “God’s glory.” The word is δόξα (*dóxa*), which does mean glory, but it also can refer to the divine essence of God which is the case in this context and is best translated:

Hebrews 1:3 The Son is the shining forth of God’s divine essence, and the exact representation of His being ...

1. “Exact representation” is the Greek noun χαρακτήρ, (*charaktér*). It is the source of the English word “*charaktér*.” In the Greek, it means “engraving tool” and is used metaphorically as the very image of God’s essence. This makes reference to the divine attributes which the deity of Christ possesses equally with the Father and the Holy Spirit.
2. These include sovereignty, righteousness, justice, eternal life, love, omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence, immutability and veracity.

Hebrews 1:3 The Son is the shining forth of God’s divine essence, and the exact equivalent of His divine attributes, sustaining all things by His powerful Word.



1. This Son of God, Heir of all things, the shining forth of divine essence, and the One who possesses the divine attributes is now identified as the member of the Trinity Who is the power behind the orderly arrangement of the universe.
2. The word “sustaining” is the verb **φέρω** (*phérō*) and means, “to bear.” According to Colossians 1:16–17, Jesus Christ is the member of the Trinity Who created the universe:

Colossians 1:16 By Christ all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible ... all things were created through Him and for Him.

v. 17 He is before all things [eternity past], and by Him all things hold together.

3. The words, “hold together,” are the verb **συνίστημι**, *sunístēmi* which means, “that which is together, brought into a compact arrangement.” In other words, this universe was not only created by Jesus Christ, He is the One Who “holds it together.”
4. In Hebrews 1:3 the Lord “bears” the duty of continuing to hold it together until He determines to, eventually, let it go.
5. It is by the power of the Lord’s Word that this universe continues to function. He does not have to address this circumstance verbally, but merely establish within His own thought the mechanics by which it is held together and then to maintain its arrangement by means of His omniscience until the end of the millennial kingdom when He has decreed to “let it go.” When he does let go, we learn what happens next from:

2 Peter 3:10 But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the Earth and everything in it will be laid bare. (NIV)

6. In the meantime, the Lord is righteous to maintain the universe in a stable orderly arrangement by means of those laws that He established for this purpose e.g., orbital mechanics, gravity, laws of motion, thermodynamics, chemical, algebraic, and geometric equations and formulas.
7. What Pythagoras, Ptólemy, Copérnicus, Galiléo, Képler, Newton, Cláusius, Plänck, and others discovered, Jesus Christ not only invented, but also to this very moment guarantees their continuation.