



## The Superiority of Jesus Christ: Introduction; The Church Age Is Superior to the Age of Israel because Its Pioneer is Superior to the Prophets, Heb 1:1-4

*The Superiority of Jesus Christ*

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### *Introduction*

Our studies over the years have emphasized the principle that the assets available to the Church Age believer are superior to those provided believers in all other dispensations. By becoming skillful in the use of these assets, the Church Age believer is able to execute a unique system of spiritual skills that enables him to glorify Christ and to magnify the power of the Word of God. Today on this first day of Christmas week, we focus our attention on the Pioneer and Perfecter of this unique system, our Lord Jesus Christ.

The book of Hebrews will be the center of our study. This epistle is directed to Jewish Christians of the first century who became confused regarding the new mandates of the new dispensation. Scholars believe the primary audience was Jewish believers in Rome as the writer's salutation seems to suggest:

**Hebrews 13:24 -** Greet all those who rule over you, and all the saints.  
Those from Italy greet you.

As all of the New Testament epistles, Hebrews was written during the incipient stages of Christianity. Newly converted Jewish believers were in special need of clarification on certain doctrines that brought into question long-held beliefs taught to them from the Old Testament. They were reared on teachings that stressed rituals associated with sacrifices and feast days centered on the Temple in Jerusalem and now they were to replace these by a simple faith in the Man called Jesus. Consequently there was a tendency to accept the Messiahship of Jesus while holding on to the traditions of the ritual plan. The book of Hebrews is designed to address these concerns and to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus Christ to the old plan with which these believers were accustomed.

Therefore, the book of Hebrews was written to demonstrate how the ritual plan of God for the dispensation of Israel has been superseded by the systematic plan of God in the dispensation of the Church. Its purpose is to influence these Jews to break away from the legalism and ritual of the old system and move on toward spiritual maturity by means of the new *modus operandi* demonstrated by Christ.

In order to accomplish this, the author of Hebrews is led to demonstrate to the Jewish Christians that the new system and its Founder are superior to the old ritual and its prophets.

If one were asked to characterize the book of Hebrews by just one word it would be **κρείττων**, **kreittōn**, which is used 13 times in the epistle. Consequently, a definition is in order:

**κρείττων, kreittōn:** Better; more useful; more profitable; more conducive to good; superior; more excellent; of a higher nature; more valuable; more prominent; higher in rank; preferable; more advantageous.

All of these definitions adequately describe the elevated relationship the spiritual life of the Church Age has over the Age of Israel. The former is markedly superior to the latter.

Further, *kreittōn* is formed from the Greek noun **κράτος, kratōs**, meaning "strong, power, and dominion." The verb form, **κρατέω, krateō**, means "to be superior to," "to lay hold of," "to retain."

Thus, that which is described as *kreittōn* is not only superior but has the power to cause actions which produce effects.

We will distill the definition of *kreittōn* down to one English word: superior. In today's study we will emphasize passages in which this word is found in the book of Hebrews.



*I. The Church Age Is Superior to the Age of Israel because Its Pioneer is Superior to the Prophets*

**Hebrews 1:1 - [NIV]** In the past, God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets ...

1. “In the past” refers to the Age of Israel. During this dispensation, God communicated His revelations to the ancestors of the writer’s Jewish audience by means of prophets.
2. A prophet is a human who represents God before man as ambassadors admonishing them to turn from sin in order to avoid divine punishment individually or collectively.
3. By contrast, a priest is a human who approaches God on behalf of mankind by means of sacrifice.
4. Much of the Old Testament was written by prophets under the enabling power of endowment, a temporary ministry of the Holy Spirit which was inferior to the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Church Age which is permanent.

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

5. “Many times” indicates the fact that the Old Testament canon was developed over a period of time—some 1,000 years.
6. “In various ways” denotes the several means that God utilized to communicate His Word to the prophets:
  - (1) Direct verbal instruction from the voice of God;
  - (2) Theophanies, face-to-face encounters with Jesus Christ;
  - (3) Teaching angels;
  - (4) Visions, which are trances that occur while the prophet is awake; and
  - (5) Dreams, which are mental images that occur while the prophet is asleep.
7. The phrase that introduces the book, “In the past,” refers to the fact that there has been a first revelation from God to men: the Old Testament.
8. This first revelation is not to be tossed aside but it is to give way to a new set of instructions found in the New Testament. How God speaks to us now is found in the next verse:

**Hebrews 1:2 -** But in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son ...

1. “In these last days” speaks of the doctrine of the imminency of the rapture. The writers of the New Testament epistles understood that the resurrection of the Church could occur at any time, therefore, they referred to the Church Age as the “last days.” In some contexts this term also includes the Tribulation which is prophesied to follow immediately after the rapture.
2. The means by which God initially spoke to us is through His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ in hypostatic union during the Incarnation, a transitional period documented by the four Gospels.
3. The Incarnation of Christ constituted a separate dispensation which connects yet divides the dispensation of Israel from that of the Church.
4. During the Incarnation, Jesus Christ demonstrated the new playing rules for the new dispensation to come.



5. During the Incarnation, God speaks to us not through prophets but through His Son. Consequently, it is clearly revealed that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is superior to the prophets of God.
6. To observe how Christ functioned in the Incarnation is to understand the application of mystery doctrines of the New Testament.

**Hebrews 1:2** - But in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things ...

7. Jesus Christ is the Heir of God's eternal kingdom. As members of the royal family of God, we become joint-heirs with Christ. What He inherits, we inherit:

**Romans 8:16** - The Holy Spirit Himself 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 joint-heirs with Christ ...

8. In the future, Jesus Christ will rule over a perfect earth and a glorified humanity of resurrected Church Age believers.

**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 made the universe.

9. The clause “made the universe” is incorrect. The word in the Greek is the accusative plural of the noun:

**αἰών, aiōn-** “eternity” or “age”

10. It is incorrect to translate this word “world” or “universe.” The word for world is **κόσμος, kosmos**.
11. Translating *aiōn* with the English word “world” is very loose. The word *aiōn* does carry a spatial concept in which “time” is distinguished from “eternity.” Since the world and the universe are a part of “time” then this translation occurs but it is usually not accurate.
12. Here it refers to an unspecified period of time or segments of time as they occur in succession. Thus the best translation is “dispensations.”
13. God designed history to unfurl in periods of time called dispensations. Jesus Christ is the key to the interpretation of each of these periods of history.

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

**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 designed the dispensations.

**v. 3** - The Son is the radiance of God's glory ...

1. The word “radiance” is noun:

**ἀπαύγασμα, apaugasma-** “effulgence”

This word describes a luminous body from which shines forth the glory of God. The best English word to describe this characteristic of Christ is “effulgence”: “to shine forth brilliantly; to flash forth; to send forth intense light; resplendent; radiant” (*OED*, 1:836).



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 Age of Israel it was, first, the Tabernacle in the Wilderness and, later, the Temple in Jerusalem.
4. In the Church Age it is the believer in Jesus Christ who becomes the temple for the Shekinah Glory by means of the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit.
5. When Jesus Christ was present in the Tabernacle there appeared over its Holy of Holies a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night.
6. This “presence” of the Lord in the Tabernacle was referred to by the Israelites as the Shekinah Glory.
7. Shekinah comes from the Hebrew word:  
**שְׁכִינָה *Shechinah*** - “that which dwells or resides”
8. This word does not appear in the Hebrew text but was used by Jews and later by Christians to express the visible divine presence.
9. It is accompanied by the word:  
**כְּבוֹד *kavoth*** - “glory”  
  
This word is best described by the Latin term *gravis* which means “heavy.” The Hebrew means this as well and figuratively refers to someone who is honored, glorious, or glorified. It refers to the reputation of an individual.
10. The New Testament word is:  
**δόξα, *doxa*** - “the nature of God in self-manifestation, i.e., what He essentially is and does, as exhibited in whatever way He reveals Himself; brightness or splendor emanating from God as in the Shekinah Glory” (Vine, et al., *EDBW*, 483).
11. Thus the term became a title for Jesus Christ as the God of Israel. When verse 3 opens by saying that the Lord is **ἀπαύγασμα δόξα, *apaugasma doxa***, the writer is identifying Jesus to his Jewish audience as the Shekinah Glory, the God of Israel.
12. This not only asserts that the Lord has the exact same reputation as the God of the Old Testament but that He *is* the God of the Old Testament. This is amplified by the next phrase:

**Hebrews 1:3 - The Son is the effulgence of God's glory and the exact representation of His being ...**

13. This statement expands the concept of glory by identifying the Lord's reputation with the divine attributes.
14. The Son possesses the exact same qualities, characteristics, and attributes as does the Father and the Holy Spirit: sovereignty, justice, eternal life, love, omnipotence, omniscience, omnipresence, immutability, and veracity.

**Hebrews 1:3 - The Son is the effulgence of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature, and He is sustaining all things by the word of His power ...**

15. This Son of God, Heir of all things, Designer of the dispensations, the Shekinah Glory with divine essence is now said to be the power behind the orderly arrangement of “all things.”



16. The word for “sustaining” in the Greek is the present active participle of the verb:  
**φέρω, *pherō*** - “to carry a burden”
17. The concept behind *doxa*, glory, is to have the capacity to take responsibility for others; the power to provide and maintain a source of supply; a reputation backed by ability and performance; the characteristics of personal essence that makes these things possible.
18. *Pherō* takes this idea and applies it to the sustaining of all things in the universe throughout human history. Jesus Christ not only has the authority over the universe He sustains the universe and all that is in it.
19. *Pherō* is a retroactive progressive present which denotes action which has begun in the past (creation) and continues into the present (right now). This is also called the present of duration.
20. Thus our Lord is revealed as continuously concentrating on an infinite number of things: orbital mechanics, gravity, laws of motion, thermodynamics, chemical, algebraic, and geometric equations and formulas, calculus, trigonometry, and physics.
21. What Pythagorus, Ptolemy, Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, Newton, Clausius and others discovered, Jesus Christ not only invented but to this very moment is guaranteeing their continuation.

**Hebrews 1:3** - The Son is the effulgence of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature, and He is sustaining all things by the word of His power. After He had provided purification for sins ...

22. This further identifies Jesus Christ as superior to the Old Testament's ritual plan. Here the writer reviews the accomplishment of His mission during the Incarnation by becoming a substitutionary sacrifice for our sins.
23. After this the Lord remained on earth 40 more days in resurrection body after which He ascended into heaven where He was assigned the highest place of honor:

**Hebrews 1:3** - The Son is the effulgence of God's glory and the exact representation of His nature, and He is sustaining all things by the word of His power. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

24. The right hand of the throne of God in the Holy of Holies in the heavenly Temple is the place of the highest and most supreme honor.
25. The writer of Hebrews has now compiled a long list of reasons Jesus Christ is superior to the Old Testament's prophets. He is:
- (1) the Son of God,
  - (2) the Heir of all things,
  - (3) the Designer of the dispensations,
  - (4) the Shekinah Glory,
  - (5) the possessor of divine essence,
  - (6) the Sustainer of all things in the universe, and
  - (7) seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

26. If these things are not convincing enough, the remainder of chapter 1 stresses the point of His superiority even further.

**Hebrews 1:4** - So He became as much superior to the angels as the name He has inherited is superior to theirs.



1. Here we see the word **κρείττων, kreittōn** used for the first time in the epistle. Jesus Christ in His true humanity is said to have become superior to the entire angelic creation.
2. The inference is that at one time He was inferior to the angels. Such an assumption is corroborated in:

**Philippians 2:7** - But Christ deprived [ **κένωσις, kenōsis: to divest oneself of privileges, i.e., the independent use of divine attributes** ] Himself of the proper function of deity, having assumed the form or essence of a slave, having been born in the outward likeness of mankind [ **emphasizes true humanity without the sinful nature but with the human spirit from birth** ].

**v. 8** - And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of [ **substitutionary spiritual** ] death, even the death of the cross.

**v. 9** - Therefore also, God highly exalted Him and gave Him a name which is above every name.

3. In His true humanity during the Incarnation, Jesus was made lower than the angels. But in His resurrection He became superior to the angels.
4. Logic demands the conclusion that if Christ is superior to the angels, He is also superior to the prophets.
5. His degree of superiority over the angels is amplified next. The name, Jesus, is said to be superior to the angels. But the word “name” is better translated “rank” or “title” in this context.
6. And the rank and title given to Jesus is “King of kings and Lord of lords.”

**Revelation 19:16** - On His robe and on His thigh He has this name written: **KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.**

7. Thus it can be seen that the royal title of Jesus is superior to the angels and by deduction superior to the prophets.
8. Consequently, the New Testament—with its mystery doctrines of the Church Age—is superior to the Old Testament and the ritual plan of God for the Age of Israel.
9. Our Lord’s superiority over the angels is amplified in Hebrews 1:5-14
10. The conclusions reached from chapter 1:
  - (1) Jesus Christ is superior to the Old Testament prophets.
  - (2) Jesus Christ is superior to the angels.