

C. Superior to Moses and His Ministration (3:1-4:13)

Chapter three begins a shift in the writer's focus, but not one that is abstract or unrelated to the preceding material. Indeed, the chapter begins with a Greek term that introduces a logical or appropriate consequence or inference of what precedes. It carries the sense of *whereupon* or *for this reason*, showing that the writer regarded the things he was about to speak of as following naturally, if not necessarily, from what he'd already discussed. And so, while he turned his attention to the person and ministry of Moses, he did so as building on his previous arguments.

Specifically, his concern was with Moses' role as *mediator* between God and His covenant people, and this theme establishes the connection between chapters two and three. The gist of the writer's reasoning is that Jesus' role as High Priest has its foundational precedent and archetype in Moses' mediation (and only later in the Aaronic priesthood). But while Jesus' mediatorial work corresponded to Moses' mediation, it also transcended it as *fulfilling* it; Jesus is the ultimate Prophet/Mediator that Moses only prefigured (Deuteronomy 18:15-19).

1. The preceding context highlighted Jesus' superiority over the angels as True Man, but specifically as He is *Man unto mankind*. Jesus' supreme glory as Man, the Image-Son, has its goal in the glorification of the human creature; Jesus was a son of Adam to become a new Adam – the Last (eschatological) Adam as the fountainhead of a new human race. It's in this sense and toward this goal that He is the embodiment of God's mercy as His faithful High Priest (2:9-17). It is this priestly ministration and its fruit that the writer had in view as he exhorted his readers to "*consider Jesus*" (3:1-4).
 - a. Again, the writer viewed his exhortation as a logical implication of his preceding instruction. His Jewish readers almost certainly had some understanding of Jesus' priestly status and role, but perhaps they hadn't considered His priesthood as the writer was here presenting it. And even if they had, the profundity of Jesus' person and work merited their fullest consideration and continual contemplation, and this is exactly what the writer was calling for. Unfortunately, the verb *consider* used in many English versions fails to convey this. In contemporary usage, one "considers" something when he takes note of it and gives it some passing thought. But the Greek verb expresses the idea of serious, attentive scrutiny. It is what a person does when he carefully and thoroughly examines something in order to rightly understand it. And that understanding, then, enables the person to properly relate to that thing (cf. 10:24; also Matthew 7:3; Luke 12:24, 27, 20:23; Acts 11:5-6; Romans 4:19; James 1:23-24).
 - b. And so, the writer wasn't calling his readers to give some general thought or consideration to the person of Jesus of Nazareth, but to ponder deeply the profound truths concerning Him that he'd put before them, and the significance of those truths for their faith, self-understanding and practical living as His people. They were to give fresh scrutiny to Jesus as those who participate in the fruit of His work as sharers in Him – as sons of glory in the Son of Glory. They were to ponder Him as God's *holy ones* and *partakers of a heavenly calling* (3:1a).

Describing his readers as *holy*, but specifically in relation to Jesus, put a new twist on their self-understanding as Jews. All Israelites regarded themselves as holy in the sense that they were part of the Abrahamic people God had chosen and consecrated to Himself. Israel was a “holy nation,” but their consecration was a matter of covenant calling, not objective reality. God had set Israel apart to Himself, but the reality was that His covenant people remained estranged from Him, despising their unique calling and defiling their profession (cf. Exodus 19:1-8, 24:1-8, 32:1-8; also Isaiah 1:1-4; Ezekiel 20:1-26; Hosea 11:1-7). The covenant children, consecrated as “holy to the Lord,” were children in name only.

Israel had proved incapable of fulfilling its covenant identity and calling as God’s holy “son,” but Jesus was born a son of Abraham in order to be Israel in truth for the sake of Israel. God had purposed that the Abrahamic seed would become “yes and amen” in Him, and this is the sense in which the writer referred to his readers as “holy brethren.” They could no longer define their holiness by their *Jewish* identity, but by their share in the Holy One. They were true Jews – true brethren in Abraham – by virtue of new birth and new circumcision (Romans 2:28-29).

Similarly, their relation to Jesus brought a new quality to their status as “*partakers of a heavenly calling.*” This descriptor, too, had defined the Hebrew people from the time God made His covenant with Abraham; every Jew recognized that his personal identity was bound up in the fact that he was part of the family to whom the God of heaven had issued His call. But now, in Jesus, things had changed: Whereas the Abrahamic people had shared a calling that *originated* in heaven, the true children of Abraham now enjoyed a calling that *bound them* to heaven. It was no longer a matter of a word issued from heaven, but the incarnate Word that descended to earth to lift men up to heaven, so as to seat them in the heavenly places in the enthroned Messiah (Ephesians 2:4-6).

- Men participated in the former calling through *natural* means, whether by birth or conversion. But the latter calling is effected *supernaturally*, by supernatural birth and incorporation. It is a calling that men share by sharing in the Called One (cf. Isaiah 42:1-7, 49:1-13, 55:1-5; cf. also Joel 2:28-32 with Acts 2:1-39; also Romans 1:1-7; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31).
- The former calling pertained to those who were part of the household of Israel, while the latter pertains to those who are part of the renewed covenant house that Jesus is building in Himself as the True Israel (cf. Isaiah 49:1-6; Ephesians 2:11-3:7; 1 Peter 2:1-10).

And so, as it was with their holy status, so it was with their calling: *These readers needed to understand and embrace that they were “holy brethren” and “partakers of a heavenly calling,” not because they were covenant descendents of Abraham, but because they were sharers in the Seed of Abraham who is the ultimate object of the covenant and its promises – the One in whom all of God’s promises and calling are “yes and amen”* (Galatians 3:16-29; Ephesians 1:3-23).

- c. And the writer was intentional in identifying his readers in this way: He recognized that this self-understanding was foundational to them being able to rightly heed his exhortation. For they were to ponder *Jesus*, and not abstractly or generically, but as the “*Apostle and High Priest of their confession.*”

The author was about to bring Moses into his instruction, and this phrase anticipates that development. For, he was going to explore the correlation between Moses and Jesus as each served as God’s appointed mediator between Him and His people. In doing so, he was simply following the precedent of Israel’s scriptures, which connected Moses with the coming messianic figure in precisely this way (Deuteronomy 18:15-19). As mediator, Moses had represented God to Israel and Israel to God: He conveyed God’s words and will to His covenant “son,” and carried the son’s pleas and failings before God (cf. Exodus 19-24, 32-33). In this way, Moses was God’s *apostle* (sent to men in His name and on His behalf) and *high priest* (coming before God on men’s behalf). One might object that *Aaron* was God’s chosen high priest, but Aaron’s priesthood, as the Israelite nation, was grounded in and sustained by Moses’ priestly mediation (ref. Exodus 4:1-16, 32:1-14; Leviticus 1-9; Numbers 12:1-16, 14:1-20).

The epistle’s Jewish audience understood these things, and would have naturally associated Moses with the expression, “apostle and high priest of your confession.” For, whatever their individual differences, every Jew placed Moses at the center of his profession of his Jewish identity and relationship with God. Indeed, the very covenant that defined that identity and relationship was known as the *Torah of Moses* (cf. Matthew 8:1-4, 22:23-28; Mark 7:5-13, 10:1-4; Luke 2:21-24; John 5:39-47, 7:14-24, 9:1-29; Acts 6:1-14, 15:1-21; etc.).

The Jews had long regarded Moses as their great apostle and high-priestly mediator, but the Hebrews writer was directing his Jewish readers to shift their gaze to *Jesus* as the one who actually holds that distinction. Most importantly, He holds it, not as stripping it from Moses, but as the individual whom Moses and his ministration prefigured: *It was precisely in anticipation of another to come that Moses carried out the role of apostle and high priest of Israel’s confession* (cf. Exodus 20:18-21 with Deuteronomy 18:15-19; also Acts 3:1-24, 7:37).

This is the only time that the New Testament refers to Jesus as an apostle, and many have puzzled over it. For apostles were men who represented Jesus and His message; men who were largely chosen by Jesus Himself. But again, an *apostle* is simply a “sent one” – a person sent out as an appointed representative or messenger. In the fundamental sense, then, Jesus was the *preeminent* apostle, as the Son sent into the world on God’s behalf (Psalm 40:7-8; Isaiah 60:1-2; John 5:24-38). He represented His Father to men, but as *embodying* Him (John 14:1-11). Jesus didn’t merely speak God’s words on His behalf, He was the incarnate word. To experience Him was to “hear” the word of the living God. So all other apostles were simply extensions of Jesus and His apostolic mission: *As the Father sent Him, so He sent them* (John 20:20-22; cf. also 14:12, 15:26-16:11, 17:18).

Jesus is God's true Apostle, but He is also His true High Priest. Just as He represented God by embodying Him, so He represented men by embodying their humanity as a true son of Adam. In His very person, Jesus brought together in vital union and perfect communion the living God and His human image-bearer. Thus Jesus' seemingly distinct roles of Apostle and High Priest are actually inseparable, mutual and interdependent: *His priesthood presumed His apostolic commission, even as His priestly ministration was the goal of His apostleship.* Jesus was and is the consummate Apostle and High Priest, and therefore the consummate *mediator* between God and men.

This was the writer's fundamental premise entering into this new context, and it's the framework for his comparison between Jesus and Moses. It's also the key to the writer's meaning in referring to Jesus as the object of *confession*. In its verb form, this term literally means *to say the same thing*, and so carries the basic sense of open agreement. In the Scripture, confession concerns a person's agreement with *God*, whether that agreement pertains to oneself (as in confession of sin), truths that God has made known, or even the truth of God Himself (as in confessing God's name). Not surprisingly, then, confession in the New Testament always implicates *Jesus* (ref. 4:14, 10:23; cf. Matthew 3:5-12 with 10:32; also John 9:18-22; Romans 10:9-10; 2 Corinthians 9:13; 1 Timothy 6:12-13).

Here, confession has to do with Jesus as Apostle and High Priest, and there are two possible ways the writer can be interpreted: He could have been speaking of the confession (profession) of Christ *Himself* as Apostle and High Priest, or the confession of the *truth* that Jesus is God's Apostle and High Priest. Both suit the context, and, in fact, each interpretation suggests the other, so it's not necessary to choose between the two. To confess Jesus as Apostle and High Priest is to confess this truth about Him, and vice versa.

- d. Again, the two-fold designation, Apostle and High Priest, highlights Jesus' mediatorial role of representing God to men and men to God. This directly connects Him with Moses, not only because Moses epitomized this sort of mediation in the Old Testament era, but because God explicitly identified Moses as a *prototype*: His role as chosen mediator prefigured and anticipated another to come – a man whose prophetic and mediatorial work would correspond to Moses', but would also transcend it as *fulfillment* transcends *promise*.

And so, while both Moses and Jesus were "faithful in all God's house" to Him who appointed them (3:2; cf. also Numbers 12:1-8), the writer insisted that Jesus' ministration was superior. But not because Jesus was more faithful than Moses, but because He enjoys a superior status and a superior goal and outcome in His ministration. In the writer's words, Jesus is worthy of more glory than Moses, in the same sense that the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself (v. 3). His point was this: Both Jesus and Moses were faithful *in* God's house, but Jesus was part of that house as its builder. Thus He enjoys a greater honor, and so is worthy of greater glory than Moses, who was simply a member of the house.

Recognizing that this “house” refers, in the first instance, to the household of Israel (v. 2), it raises the question of how Jesus can be regarded as its builder. The man Jesus of Nazareth was *born into* the house of Israel, just like Moses was. And if Jesus was an Israelite, then the “house” predated Him. How, then, can it be said that He built it? The writer gives two clues to his meaning, the first in verse 4, and the second in verses 5-6.

- 1) Verse 4 situates Jesus’ role as builder within the larger truth that God is the builder of all things. For some, this seems to put the idea of *incarnation* into the forefront. That is, Jesus is the human embodiment of the divine Logos, which was God’s self-communication prior to the incarnation (John 1:1-14). The God who pledged to Abraham to make him the father of a great nation did so as the Logos, so that the Logos built Abraham’s “house” by calling it into existence. The man Jesus wouldn’t be born until two thousand years later, but as He is the Logos incarnate, it is proper to speak of Him as the builder of the house.
- 2) At the same time, the broader context indicates that the writer had a different idea in mind, one that concerns Jesus’ *vocation* more than His divine nature. He recognized Jesus as the builder of God’s house – the covenant house of Israel – in the way that the apostles did. Jesus wasn’t simply a son of Abraham, but the *unique* son who was the focal point of the covenant and its promises. He is the One in whom the covenant and its underlying purposes are truly and fully realized. *He* is Israel (the covenant seed of Abraham) for the sake of Israel; in Him, Israel’s identity and calling are fulfilled. Jesus is the true Israelite (John 1:47) in whom Israel became Israel *indeed*, and thus He is the true builder of God’s house.

Jesus built the house of Israel by fulfilling Israel’s calling as son, servant, disciple and witness. But Israel’s calling had global – indeed cosmic – significance. Abraham’s fatherhood looked beyond a single family of descendents to a multitude of nations; Abram was to become *Abraham*. Thus the “house” God determined to build in Abraham was a new *human* house – a house comprised of covenant children drawn from all nations and peoples (Genesis 12:1-3, 17:1-5). The house Jesus built in Himself began as the true house of Israel, but unto Israel’s global mission. He reconstituted Abram’s household around Himself (hence the twelve Jewish apostles as the house’s foundation), but in order to build the all-encompassing human house God pledged to Abraham (Isaiah 11:1-3; 49:1-6, 53:1-55:5; Zechariah 2-3; Ephesians 2:11-3:6; 1 Peter 2:4-10).

And so, Jesus was born into God’s house (the Abrahamic household) and was faithful in it, just as Moses was. But unlike Moses, He entered that house as the human embodiment of the God who’d called it into existence (v. 4), in order to build the house as God intended it to be. And He’s proven faithful to this work, first by embodying the house, and thereafter by continuing to enlarge it upon Himself as the Chief Cornerstone.