

The Hebrews our Teachers

(Jesus Christ: Prophet, Priest & King)

The aim of this short series is to develop a better understanding of what it means for us to call Jesus the Christ.

QUESTION: We speak of Jesus as "Christ" – the Greek word for the Hebrew "Messiah", but what does this title mean? Messiah means anointed one – the chosen one of God – but what was Christ chosen for, and to what office was He anointed?

It might be helpful first of all to look to the Old Testament to see what roles men were anointed for. In the Old Testament the term "anointed" was applied to three offices in the nation of Israel:

- (i) **The priests** – they were anointed with holy oil, particularly the High Priest (e.g., Exodus 28:41, Leviticus 4:3, 5, 16; 21:10).
- (ii) **The prophets** – they are called *hoi christoi Theou*, "the anointed of God" (Psalm 105:15).
- (iii) **The kings** – a king of Israel was described upon occasion as *christos tou Kuriou*, "the anointed of the Lord" (1 Samuel 2:10, 35; 2 Samuel 1:14; Psalm 2:2; 18:50; Habakkuk 3:13). This term was even used of Cyrus, the Persian King (Isaiah 45:1).

The title *ho Christos*, "the Christ," is not used of Christ in the Greek version of the Old Testament. In the New Testament the word is frequently used of Jesus either with the article (as a description of His identity e.g. Matthew 2:4; Acts 2:31) or without the article (as a title e.g. Luke 2:11; 23:2; John 1:41). Three times the Lord Jesus accepted the word as a title for Himself (Matthew 16:16&17; Mark 14:61-62; John 4:25&26).

These three offices had roles as mediators between God and His people.

- (i) **Prophets** represent God to men. A **Prophet** of God was sent from God to speak His words to the People. God rarely spoke to the people directly, as He had at Mount Sinai. If they were to know God's Truth, they had to hear it from the Prophets. God sent Prophets to the people to tell them His will.
- (ii) **Priests** represented men to God. They showed a way for God's people to come back to Him.
- (iii) **Kings** ruled over the people in God's name, accountable to Him.

So, in what sense is Christ a prophet, a priest and a king? One book in the New Testament, more than any other, describes the continuity and discontinuity between the Old Testament people of Israel and their system of worship and the person of Christ and His work. It was written to 1st Century Jews (or Hebrews) who were wavering indecisively between making a definite break with Judaism to become Christians and retreating back into the Old Testament patterns of worship to convince them that Christ was superior to the Old Testament, and that the New Covenant promised by Jeremiah (Ch 31) was now present through Christ.

KEY TEXT: Hebrews 1:1-3

¹In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, ²but 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. ³The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

In these verses we see three offices of Christ:

- **PROPHET:** "God ... has spoken to us by His Son" (v2)
- **PRIEST:** "He ... provided purification for sins" (v3)
- **KING:** "He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven" (v3)

Over this series of three studies we will discover what it means for Christ to be a prophet, priest and king, and what difference this makes in our lives today.

1. Jesus Christ the Prophet (Hebrews 3:1-6)

"God ... has spoken to us by His Son" (Hebrews 1:1&2)

Key Message: Christ our prophet reveals God to us

INTRODUCTION: Clear Communication is Vital

Did you ever struggle to find the right words to express yourself – perhaps in an exam or in a relationship? Good communication depends on three factors:

1. THE COMMUNICATOR:

The communicator must present the message clearly without ambiguity, as this story illustrates:

J. Edgar Hoover director of the FBI for a staggering 48 years (1924-1972), was a pretty powerful figure, with the result that almost all of his subordinates were on the lookout for ways to impress him. A young FBI man was put in charge of the FBI's supply department. In an effort to cut some costs and impress his boss, he reduced the size of the office memo paper. One of the new memo sheets soon ended up on Hoover's desk. Hoover took one look at it, determined he didn't like the size of the margins on the paper, and quickly scribbled on the memo, "Watch the borders!" The memo was passed on through the office. For the next six weeks, it was extremely difficult to enter the USA by road from either Mexico or Canada. The FBI was watching the borders. Why was the FBI watching the borders? They thought they had received a warning from their chief. But they hadn't. They had transformed an innocuous comment into a solemn warning.

2. THE MESSAGE:

The message has got to be worth hearing, and communicated clearly in a way that is relevant to the hearers. Take this poem, for example:

Scintillate, scintillate, globule vivific, Fain would I fathom thy nature specific.
Loftily poised in the ether capacious, Strongly resembling a gem carbonaceous.

Translated to a slightly more simple form it reads:

Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are,
Up above the world so high,
Like a diamond in the sky.

Which version would you sing to your pre-school child?

3. THE LISTENER:

The listener must be listening, and the message must bridge the understanding gap between the listener and the communicator. This gap can be a result of cultural, education, experiential differences between the two. This (apparently) true story illustrates this quite clearly:

A Western couple went to a certain Far Eastern country on holiday, taking their pet poodle with them. They wanted, besides their own supper, something to give their pet, so, pointing to the dog, they made international eating signs. The waiter understood, picked up the poodle, and set off for the kitchen – only to return half an hour later with the roasted poodle on a platter.

BACKGROUND: The Old Testament Prophets

GOD COMMUNICATES

The reality of God as One who communicates is foundational to the Christian faith. We don't believe in a blind force or distant dictator, but in a personal God who is involved in His world, working through human history to accomplish His eternal purposes. God has spoken to us through:

A] "General" Revelation

1. Creation (Romans 1:20)
2. Conscience (Romans 2:15)

B] "Special" Revelation

3. Covenant – Law & Prophets (Hebrews 1:2)
4. Christ (Hebrews 1:2)

THE PROPHETS: MESSENGERS OF THE COVENANT

The OT prophets were the messengers of the Covenant. At least 24 prophets are named in the OT – of these 15 were responsible for writing the 16 books we now call "the Prophets" (Isaiah to Malachi). There were also

many other prophets who are not named, and also individuals we don't normally describe as prophets who prophesied – for example, the judge Samuel (1 Samuel 3:20) and King David (Psalms).

When we think of a prophet we almost certainly think of someone who foretells future events. Whilst foretelling was part of the role of the Old Testament prophets, it is too limited a view of the office. One Jewish website defines a prophet as:

“A spokesman for God, chosen to convey a message or teaching. Prophets were role models of holiness, scholarship and closeness to God” (Jewfaq.org)

Three different Hebrew words are translated “prophet”. The most common one is *nabi*, which is derived from the verb “to call”. The meaning is, therefore, either “one who is called” or “one who calls (to men in God's name)”. The other two words are both derived from the verb “to see”. My definition of a prophet, then is: *a person called by God to speak His words to His people in a specific place and time, challenging them to trust in Him and to be faithful to their covenant relationship with Him. Their words often have two horizons: the immediate situation of their time (proclamation), and the future hope of God's day of salvation (prediction).*

THE GREATEST OT PROPHET

Who was the greatest Old Testament prophet? Perhaps John the Baptist (See Matthew 11:11-13), but certainly in the Old Testament itself the greatest was also the first who could truly be described as a prophet. He was actually not remembered primarily for being a prophet – but was a leader of God's people and the one through whom God gave the Law. He was Moses. As Deuteronomy 34:10-12 says:

“Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel”.

The Jews also recognise Moses as their greatest prophet, as this quote from a Jewish website reveals:

“Moses was the greatest prophet, leader and teacher that Judaism has ever known. In fact, one of Rambam's 13 Principles of Faith is the belief that Moses' prophecies are true, and that he was the greatest of the prophets.” (Jewfaq.org)

What made Moses such a great prophet, and why does New Bible Dictionary describe him as the “standard of comparison for all future prophets”? It is because:

1. **He had a specific, personal call from God** (Exodus 3:1-4:17)
2. **He had a prophetic awareness of history** – in other words, he saw behind the events of his day to how God was working out His purposes
3. **He showed ethical and social concern** – this would become a major theme of the OT prophets as they called for social justice (Exodus 2:11ff; Deuteronomy 24:19-22; Leviticus 19:9ff)
4. **He confronted corrupt rulers** – Moses confronted Pharaoh, and throughout the Old Testament the prophets confronted corrupt kings of Israel and those nations who oppressed God's people
5. **He combined proclamation and prediction** – Moses proclaimed God's word to the people of his day, but he also predicted the coming of a future prophet (see below)
6. **He used symbols in delivery of his message** – Moses used miracles and plagues to deliver his message (Exodus 17:8ff; Numbers 21:8)
7. **He had an intercessory role** – Moses stood between God and the people as God's spokesperson to them (Exodus 18:9; Numbers 27:5)

These 7 principles become the pattern for all subsequent prophets. Not all of the prophets displayed every one of them, but these were their core ministries among God's people.

Moses also predicted that other prophets would come, and in particular a prophet “like him” (Deuteronomy 18:17-19) who would speak God's words to the people. This reference was understood to be a reference to “the prophet” who would come, and during Jesus' lifetime the Jews were expecting the coming of this prophet (see John 6:14). The identity of this prophet appears to have been expected to be one and the same as the Messiah.

FOCUS: Christ the Prophet

During His ministry Christ was occasionally described as a prophet:

- Luke 7:16: “A great prophet has appeared among us ... God has come to save His people” (after He raised the widow's son in Nain)
- Matthew 21:11: “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee” (Palm Sunday)
- John 4:19: “Sir ... I can see that you are a prophet” (the Samaritan woman)
- John 9:17: “He is a prophet” (the man born blind)

That Jesus was a prophet was the understanding of at least some of His disciples, even after His death:

- Luke 24:19, “About Jesus of Nazareth ... He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people.” (the two disciples on the Road to Emmaus)

On a couple of occasions Jesus also apparently accepted the designation of being a prophet, although in both cases the word was actually contained within a quotation used by Him:

- Matthew 13:57: "Only in his own town and in his own house is a prophet without honour"
- Luke 13:33: "surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem!" (a message to be reported to Herod)

Jesus' description of Himself and His ministry uses language that is in keeping with the prophetic ministry:

- John 6:38: "I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of Him who sent me".
- John 7:16: "My teaching is not my own. It comes from Him who sent me."
- John 12:44&45: "When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the One who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the One who sent me".

Finally, the apostle Peter identified Jesus as being the prophet like Moses (Acts 3:21-26) and the fulfilment of all the Old Testament prophets. Hebrews 1:2 describes Jesus as the one through whom God has spoken to us. So, He is the ultimate prophet, and the ultimate revelation of God.

CHRIST THE PROPHET – GREATER THAN MOSES (Hebrews 3:1-6)

In this passage the writer describes Jesus as the "apostle ... whom we confess". Perhaps we aren't used to this term for Christ (it is the only place in the New Testament where Christ is called an apostle). The word means a messenger, and has the idea of an appointed messenger who has the full authority of the one in whose name he speaks. In this sense the apostles of Christ were His appointed messengers, having authority to preach His message and write the New Testament books. In a similar sense, Christ is God's apostle – His messenger with His full authority. The term apostle in the New Testament is quite similar to the meaning of "prophet" in the Old Testament (perhaps more so than the New Testament usage of the word "prophet"). To call Christ an apostle is very close to calling Him a prophet.

As an apostle (or prophet) Christ is similar in many ways to Moses (Hebrews 3:2):

"He was faithful to the One who appointed Him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house"

This reference Moses refers Numbers 12:1-8, an occasion when even Miriam and Aaron grumbled against Moses, saying God had spoken through them as well as him. God responded by defending Moses, describing him as the most humble man on earth (v3) and a person to whom He spoke clearly face to face (v8). Christ too was of pure character and had an intimate relationship with God. Notice the emphasis in this verse on being appointed by God, and the fact that both Moses and Christ were faithful to Him. In His ministry Jesus fulfilled all the ministries of a prophet as exemplified by Moses:

1. **He had a specific, personal call from God** – this is clearly expressed at His baptism, but began long before He entered the world
2. **He had a prophetic awareness of history** – He believed Himself to be the fulfilment of the Old Testament and to be ushering in a new age of the Kingdom of God
3. **He showed ethical and social concern** – this was central to Jesus declaration of His own purpose, as exemplified by His reading from Isaiah 61:1&2 in the Synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21) and demonstrated in His teaching and miracles.
4. **He confronted corrupt rulers** – Jesus consistently opposed those leaders of the Jews who rejected Him and were hypocrites (see for example Matthew 23)
5. **He combined proclamation and prediction** – Jesus proclaimed good news for the present and also predicted the future end times (see Matthew 24)
6. **He used symbols in delivery of his message** – Jesus used parables to convey the message of the Kingdom and also used object lessons including His miracles which were signs (e.g. John 9)
7. **He had an intercessory role** – Jesus clearly claimed to be speaking directly to the people the words God had given Him. Furthermore, He prayed for His disciples (see John 17).

However, despite these similarities, the writer of Hebrews boldly claims that Jesus is greater than Moses for two reasons:

- a) **He is greater than Moses as the builder of the house is greater than the house itself** (vv3&4) – Moses served in God's house, but about the Son the writer said "through whom He made the Universe" (1:2). Jesus was the builder of the house. It is worth noting that the writer says that "God is the builder of everything" (v4), having already said that Jesus is the builder of the house. In other words, Jesus is equal with God.
- b) **He is greater than Moses as the son is greater than the servant** (vv5&6) – Moses was the servant of God, but Jesus is the Son of God "whom He appointed heir of all things" (1:2). Moses testified of what would be said in the future, but Christ is the fulfilment of that hope – the Son of God who is building a new house for God, the Church.

So, the difference between Moses and Christ is not simply in the relative greatness of their messages or miracles, but in the very identity of who they are.

Many people around the world admit that Jesus was a prophet – a person with a message from God. In Islam, for example, Christ is one of 25 prophets mentioned by name in the Qur'an (Moses is also one), and He is perhaps the second greatest prophet in Islam (after Mohammed). But we understand that Christ is not just another prophet. In fact the New Testament epistles never describe Jesus as a prophet, and even in our theme text for this min-series the writer to the Hebrews in 1:1&2 distinguishes between “the prophets” and “his Son”. Perhaps this is for two main reasons:

1. Christ is not merely another prophet in the line of Old Testament prophets from Moses to John the Baptist, He is the one to whom the prophets testify – their fulfilment. In fact, in Hebrews 1&2 the writer emphasises Christ's unique identity and role in God's purposes.

2. Jesus is not just one who speaks God's truth, He is the truth of God embodied:

- John 1:1-18 – Jesus is the Word made flesh, revealing God to us
- John 14:6 – “I am the way, the truth and the life”
- Hebrews 1:3 – He is the “exact representation” of God's being

In other words, He is not simply the messenger of God's revelation to us, He **is** God revealed to us.

Christ is indeed the greatest prophet that ever lived, but He is much more – He is the very Son of God.

His communication of God is perfect because His message was clear (He was the message), He spoke in terms the people could understand (the variety of means of communication He used is impressive) and He bridged the gap between the communicator and the listeners because He was God incarnate, living as one of us.

CONCLUSION: Ultimate Communication

The fact that Christ is **the** prophet has real significance for how we live our daily lives. His communication was the ultimate good communication:

1. The Ultimate Communicator:

Without Christ we could never fully know God. How can we know ultimate reality, ultimate truth in a world of so many conflicting ideas and theories – it is because Christ broke into our world, revealing God's character of grace and truth fully to us.

“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.” (John 1:17&18:)

So often we take this for granted – we forget what an immensely privileged position we have. We know God not because we managed to break through to this amazing discovery (our pride in every discovery we have made through science and technology pales into insignificance compared to the wonder of knowing the creator of the Universe), but because He graciously communicated Himself to us. Furthermore, because Christ is the complete revelation of God, all other Scripture must be understood through the filter of Christ. As Christians we shouldn't read OT as if we didn't have the fuller understanding of God in Christ, and we can learn to appreciate these Scriptures because we see their ultimate fulfilment in Christ. That doesn't mean that we ignore their meaning to the original hearers by spiritualising everything we read, but that we can place them in the overall plan of God's purposes throughout redemption history. Christ is the key to understanding all of Scripture.

2. The Ultimate Message

The words of Jesus bring life. Jesus told His disciples:

“The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life.” (John 6:63)

When we read and obey the words of Christ we aren't reading dead words, but living words empowered by the Holy Spirit of God. His teachings can transform people like no other teachings. They are a sure foundation for our lives. He is the way, the truth and the life. Because Christ is the ultimate revelation of God, we don't expect to have a fresh or greater revelation of God today. God still speaks, but what He says is always in keeping with His previously revealed truth and always focuses on Christ as the centre of His purposes. There may be prophets today, who speak God's word for His people (although the exact nature of New Testament prophecy needs a deeper examination), but they are always subject to Scripture and will always glorify Christ. A number of cults have been based on the concept that a new prophet had arisen with a purer message from God (e.g. Mohammed in Islam, Joseph Smith in Mormonism and Charles Russell in the Jehovah's Witnesses).

3. The Ultimate Impact on the Listeners

We are not Christ's house (Hebrews 3:6) if we are holding on to the hope we boast about, and so we share in His prophetic ministry. We have a prophetic voice to the nations, proclaiming the gospel. As God's people we declare His praises to a world that doesn't know Him. The Church of God has been called by Him and appointed by Him to bring the message about Christ to the nations. The message of Christ not only moves us, it transforms us, and makes our lives full of meaning and a new wonderful purpose – to declare His praises to the world. What greater blessing than to introduce someone to Ultimate reality?

2. Jesus the Priest (Hebrews 2:17 & 18, 4:14-5:10 & 7-8)

"He ... provided purification for sins" (Hebrews 1:3)

Key Message: Christ our High Priest meets our need

INTRODUCTION: Why Do We Need a Priest?

Have you ever felt completely under-dressed for an occasion or been somewhere where you feel really out of place? Or perhaps you have had the privilege of meeting a very important person face to face. I am sure you had either an invitation to be there or that someone introduced you to that person. Stop for a moment to ask yourself this question: Who is the most powerful person in the UK? What about the world? And what about the most powerful person in the Universe? Surely that is God – the holy, sovereign creator! What right would you have to be accepted into the presence of God? If you stood before Him now, what would you say? What right do you have to talk to Him in prayer about all the things that trouble you and all the things you want?

As human beings living in a fallen world we have many needs. We face discouragement and doubt, temptation and guilt, opposition and persecution, suffering and trials. How can we know that God cares for us in any of these struggles? How can we find His mercy and grace to meet us at the point of our need? As we come before Him in His holiness and our brokenness, what right do we have to expect anything other than condemnation and judgement? In fact, as we examine ourselves we discover that our greatest need is for forgiveness for the sin that has ruined us. The diagram below illustrates this need clearly:



This is why we need a priest. A priest is a mediator, one who can bridge the gap between God and us. To understand Christ as our High Priest, we will have to go on a voyage of discovery. Firstly we must understand the Old Testament background, then examine what Hebrews teaches us about Christ's priesthood, and finally discover how Christ's priesthood meets our need.

BACKGROUND: The Old Testament Levitical Priesthood

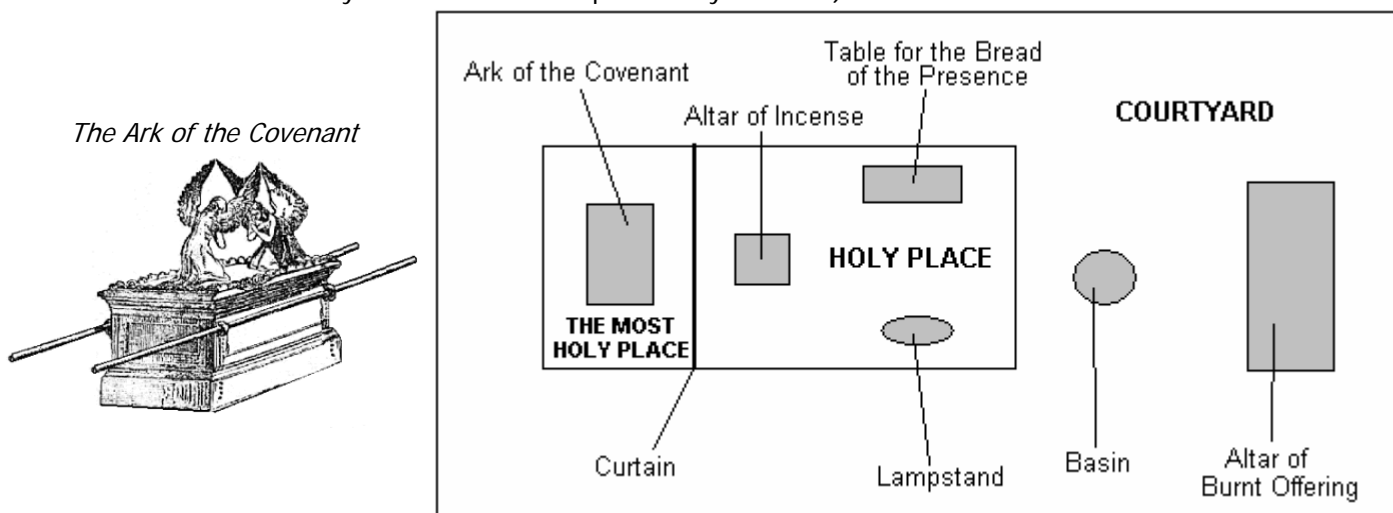
Leviticus is so named because it describes the Levitical priesthood and its sacrifices (Aaron and Moses were from the Tribe of Levi, one of Jacob's sons). The tribe of Levi was not given part of the Land of Canaan (Numbers 18:20 / Deuteronomy 10:8&9) but they were given cities (six of which became cities of refuge) and pasture land (Numbers 35:1-8). They were supported by a tithe from the people and a share from offerings made to God (Numbers 18). They were divided into 24 divisions (or shifts) (see I Chronicles 24:1-19), and the particular priest from that division serving in the Temple was determined by lots (Luke 1:8&9). Although the position of priest was hereditary the priests had to remain ceremonially clean and were not allowed to have any deformity (Leviticus 21). They wore special clothes (Exodus 28) which symbolised the holiness of God.

THE ROLE OF THE PRIESTS IN THE OT

The office of priest combined roles common to teachers, caretakers, military bands, judges and doctors today as well as the role of making sacrifices. There were at least ten functions fulfilled by the priesthood:

1. To make sacrifices on behalf of the people (Leviticus 1-5)

There were five sacrifices to be made by the people of Israel (there were also seven feasts they celebrated annually – see Leviticus 23). To understand these sacrifices we must first know something about the layout of the Tabernacle (this pattern was given by God to Moses in Exodus 25-27, and formed the basis for the layout of the later Temple built by Solomon):



The items in the Tabernacle had great significance (in fact, the whole layout of the building was intended to teach the people about the holiness of God.

ITEM	DESCRIPTION	SIGNIFICANCE
Ark of the Covenant	Golden box 130 x 60 x 60 cm containing the 10 commandments, manna & Aaron's rod	Symbolised God's covenant relationship with the people of Israel
Atonement Cover	Cover of the Ark of the Covenant – with 2 golden angels with wings outstretched	Symbolised the presence of God with His people
Curtain	Divided the Holy Place from the Most Holy Place	Symbolised the separation of people from the holy God because of sin
Table of Bread of the Presence	A table in the Holy Place on which 12 loaves of baked bread were set	The bread symbolised God's provision for the needs of the 12 tribes of Israel
Lampstands & Lamps	A golden lampstand with 7 branches containing 7 burning oil lamps	Lit the Holy Place for the Priests – represented God's watch over His people to protect them
Altar of Incense	An altar in front of the curtain in the Holy Place on which incense was burnt	Represents God's acceptance of the prayers of His people
Altar of Burnt Offering	A bronze altar outside the Tabernacle used for the sacrifices	Symbolised how sacrifice restores the relationship of the people with God
Basin	A large washbasin outside the Tabernacle used by the priests to cleanse themselves before performing their duties	Symbolised the need for spiritual cleansing before entering God's presence to serve Him

a) The Burnt Offering (Ch 1)

An offering of a male without defect, which could be a bull, sheep or goat, dove or pigeon (this allowed poorer people as well as the more wealthy to afford the sacrifice). The order of this sacrifice was (the practice was slightly different if a bird was used):

- i. The person making the sacrifice laid his hand on its head and then killed the animal
- ii. The blood was given to the priests, who sprinkled it on the altar
- iii. The person making the sacrifice then cut up the animal and washed its inner parts and legs with water
- iv. The priest then burnt the animal entirely on the altar

This sacrifice represented payment for sins in general and showed the person's devotion to God and faith in Him to provide forgiveness for his sins.

b) The Grain Offering (Ch 2)

An offering of fine flour, oil and incense or of bread or wafers seasoned with salt but without yeast or honey. The priests burnt the "memorial portion" of the offering on the altar, and kept the rest for their food (unless the sacrifice was being made on behalf of a priest, in which case the whole offering was burnt – 6:23). A variation of this offering was the firstfruits offering of roast heads of grain from the first crop of the harvest. This sacrifice showed honour & respect to God in worship – Acknowledged that everything we own belongs to God

c) The Peace (or Fellowship) Offering (Ch 3)

An offering of an animal (either male or female) without defect, which could be a cow, sheep or goat. The order of this sacrifice was:

- i. The person making the sacrifice laid his hand on its head and then killed the animal
- ii. The priests took the blood and sprinkled it on the altar
- iii. The person making the sacrifice then removed all the abdominal fat together with the kidneys and omentum (a fatty flap that covers the bowels)
- iv. The priests then burnt these parts on the altar

This sacrifice expressed gratitude to God and symbolised peace and fellowship with Him.

d) The Sin Offering (Ch 4:1-5:13)

An offering to pay for unintentional sins (e.g. thoughtlessness or neglecting to do right – see examples in 5:1-4). The animal offered depended on the person or people who had sinned: a bull for a priest or the whole community, a male goat for a leader, and a female goat or lamb for an individual within the community (or two doves or pigeons from poorer people or some fine flour without oil or incense if the person could not afford even these birds). The order for the sin offering was:

- i. The person making the offering (or the elders if it was the whole community) firstly confessed their sin and then laid their hand on the animal's head and then killed it
- ii. The priest took the blood and if it was a priest or the whole community who sinned he sprinkled it seven times in front of the curtain in the Temple then put some on the horns of the altar of incense in the Holy Place before pouring out the rest at the base of the altar of burnt offering. In the case of a leader or individual the blood was simply put on the horns of the altar of burnt offering and the rest poured out at the base of that altar.

- iii. The fat was removed as for the peace offering and burnt on the altar (in the case of birds, the whole bird was burnt on the altar, in the case of flour it was just a memorial portion).
 - iv. If a bull was sacrificed, the carcass of the animal was taken outside the camp and burnt in a wood fire on the heap of ashes from the altar of burnt offering. In the case of an offering of flour, or a goat or sheep the priest kept the rest of the flour or carcass (6:26) for food.
- This sacrifice restored the sinner to fellowship with God and reminded the people how serious sin is.

e) The Guilt Offering (Ch 5:14-6:7)

An offering of a ram without defect worth a certain amount, as payment for specific sins against God & others. The order of the sacrifice was identical to the sin offering. The person making the sacrifice was also required to provide compensation for any injured parties (this matched the cost of the offence plus an additional one fifth).

Together these sacrifices represented the people's dependence on God for every aspect of their lives:

NAME	PURPOSE	SIGNIFICANCE
Burnt Offering	Payment for sins in general	Showed the person's devotion to God
Grain Offering	To show honour & respect to God in worship	Acknowledged that everything we own belongs to God
Peace Offering	To express gratitude to God	Symbolised peace and fellowship with God
Sin Offering	Payment for unintentional sins (e.g. thoughtlessness or neglecting to do right)	Restored the sinner to fellowship with God – showed how serious sin is
Guilt Offering	Payment for specific sins against God & others	As for the sin offering. Also provided compensation for injured parties (this was paid in addition to the sacrifice to God)

2. To teach the people the Law (Leviticus 10:8-11)

The primary responsibility for ensuring that God's people grew up knowing His words rested with parents (see Deuteronomy Chapter 6), but the priests also had a responsibility to teach the nation God's Law.

3. To bless the Israelites (Numbers 6:22-27)

This famous blessing was a threefold blessing in the name of YHWH (the LORD) – a blessing of preservation, grace and peace:

*The LORD bless you and keep you;
The LORD make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you;
The LORD turn His face towards you and give you peace.*

4. To maintain the tabernacle (or later the Temple)

This included several important roles:

- a) Setting up and dismantling the Tabernacle (Numbers 4:5-15)
- b) Keeping the fire on the Altar of burnt offerings burning continually (Leviticus 6:8-13)
- c) Keeping the lamps lit (Leviticus 24:4)

5. To carry the Ark of the Covenant during the wilderness years (Deuteronomy 10:8)

During the nation's 40 years of wandering in the desert this was the responsibility of the priesthood. After they entered the land of Canaan the Ark was kept in Bethel (Judges 20:27) and later in Shiloh (I Samuel 1:9). The Philistines captured it for a time after the people of Israel took it with them to a battle at Ebenezer (I Samuel 4). The Philistines kept it in various cities for seven months before they finally had to return it because of the curses God was placing on them (see I Samuel 5&6). The ark was then kept for 20 years in Kiriath Jearim. Eventually David brought the Ark to rest in Jerusalem (II Samuel 6:2). Later it was kept in the Temple built by Solomon (I Kings 8). In the time of Josiah it was re-sited (II Chronicles 35:3) and Jeremiah foresaw a time without the ark (Jeremiah 3:16). It was probably lost when Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem in 586 BC. There was no Ark in the second Temple.

6. To sound the silver trumpets (Numbers 10:2-10)

There were two silver trumpets that were sounded by the priests during the years in the desert to summon the people to assemble and when the people went into battle

7. To encourage the people before battle (Deuteronomy 20:2-4)

8. To examine Lepers to pronounce uncleanness & healing (Leviticus 13&14)

9. To evaluate things devoted to God (Leviticus 27:8-12)

10. To act as magistrates (Deuteronomy 17:8-13)

THE HIGH PRIEST & THE DAY OF ATONEMENT

The High Priest was marked out from his fellow priests by anointing with oil (Leviticus 21:10), and usually succeeded his father in the office (Leviticus 16:32). Aaron was the first High Priest. The High Priest wore

special clothes when performing his duties including a robe with golden bells around its hem, a turban with the name of God written on it, and a breastplate with twelve stones on which the names of the tribes of Israel were inscribed (see Exodus 28). His whole person and attire represented the holiness and inapproachability of God, and when He came into the presence of God he was representing the entire nation of Israel. According to contemporary Jew, the sight of the High Priest in his robes:

“... arouses awe and emotional excitement so that one would think he had passed to some other world. I venture to affirm positively that any man who witnesses the spectacle I have recounted will experience amazement and astonishment indescribable, and his mind will be deeply moved at the sanctity attached to every detail.”

The High Priest was the only person who could enter the Most Holy Place (the central room in the Temple where the Ark of the Covenant, above which the glory of God shone, was kept) once per year on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16). Atonement means a sacrifice that takes away sin by turning away God's wrath. On that day he had to make four offerings involving 5 animals:

- 1) *A bull* – firstly he must sacrifice this for his own sin offering to make atonement for his sins and his household. The bull's blood was to be sprinkled on the atonement cover of the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place.
- 2) *Two male goats* – one of these (chosen by lot) was to be sacrificed as a sin offering for all the people. Its blood was sprinkled on the atonement cover of the Ark, and on the altar used for burnt offerings. The second goat was to be a “scapegoat” for the sins of the nation. The High Priest laid his hands on the goat's head and confess the sins of the people. The goat was then taken out into the desert and released.
- 3) *Two rams* – finally the High priest sacrificed these two rams as burnt offerings – one for his own sins and the other for the sins of the people. The bodies of the bull and the goat used for a sin offering were also burnt outside the camp.

While the High Priest was in the Most Holy Place he had to burn incense in a censor of burning coals so that the smoke would screen out the atonement cover from his view. Even the High Priest, physically pure, ceremonially clean, consecrated by anointing of oil, called by God, wearing the name of God on His forehead, could not look on the glory of God that rested on the atonement cover.

The Day of Atonement had great significance for the people of Israel, as it was the yearly occasion when atonement was made for the sins of the people. Can we imagine ourselves as the people of Israel, outside the Tabernacle, waiting for the High Priest to return: Would he be heard? Would his sacrifice on our behalf be heard? The people were distant, the priest stood between them and God. As the High priest returned out of the Tabernacle alive, the people could shout for joy and praise God for the forgiveness of their sins. As the scapegoat was released into the desert, the people knew that God had removed their sins from them, that with Him there was mercy and grace. The wrath of God was averted and they were acceptable before Him.

FOCUS: Christ the High Priest

This is one of the greatest themes of the book of Hebrews. The writer cleverly demonstrates the continuity and discontinuity between the Old Testament priesthood (the Levitical Priesthood) and Christ's priesthood. There are three key issues to grasp to understand the superiority of Christ's priesthood:

A] Christ's priesthood is similar to Aaron's (4:14-5:10)

There are two ways in which Christ's priesthood is like Aaron's:

(i) Both were human and therefore understood the people (4:14-5:3)

The Old Testament priests were human. Because they came from among the people they could sympathise with the people in their weaknesses and struggles. Christ is also human, and He was tempted in every way like us, so He can sympathise with our weaknesses (4:14-5:3). Of course, there is a vital difference – the Old Testament priests were also sinners, whereas Christ was sinless (v15).

(ii) Both were appointed to the office of High Priest by God (5:4-10)

Christ lived a life of constant reverent submission to His Father (v7). He was the Son of God before He came to earth but He learned what it means to be obedient through His suffering (v8). This was necessary for Him to be made “perfect” (meaning “complete”). This does not mean He was not perfect in His character before He suffered (in 4:15 the writer has already said that He was sinless, and he will repeat this claim in 7:26). The writer is saying that Christ was not complete in His experience and therefore not qualified to be a priest until He had suffered – His work was not finished and He could not be described as a priest until He had fulfilled His purpose for coming into the world by dying as a sacrifice.

B] Christ's priesthood is in the order of Melchizedek, not Aaron (7:1-17)

Melchizedek is a mysterious figure who appears in Genesis 14:18&19. He was the King of Salem (the city that later became known as Jerusalem), and he blessed Abraham after a battle he had won, and Abraham

gave him one tenth of all he had won in the battle. In Psalm 110 King David prophesied about a person who would be appointed as a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek. The writer of Hebrews gives us three reasons why the priestly order of Melchizedek is greater than the order of Aaron:

a) Melchizedek was not only a priest of God, he was also a King (7:1).

Melchizedek's name means "King of Righteousness" and he was also King of Salem which means "King of Peace" (7:2). These names speak of his greatness and could be applied literally to Christ, the King of peace and righteousness.

b) The basis of the order of Melchizedek is an indestructible life, not ancestry

There is no record of Melchizedek's beginning or end, and he remains a priest for ever (7:3). Thus, Jesus, although He was from the tribe of Judah, not Levi, could be a priest because God appointed Him and He too had no beginning and no end (7:11-17).

c) Melchizedek's order predates the Levitical priesthood.

Melchizedek blessed Abraham, and Abraham paid tithes to him (not vice versa), proving that he was greater than Abraham, who was the ancestor of Levi and Aaron (7:4-10).

C] Christ's priesthood is better than Aaron's (7:18-10:18)

(i) It is based on an oath of God (7:20-22)

The Old Testament priests were not appointed by oath, but Christ was. This oath means that Christ guarantees a better covenant.

(ii) It is permanent because Christ lives forever (7:23-25)

Christ lives forever, so His priesthood is just as effective today as it was when He died. He lives forever as our High priest.

(iii) He is sinless and needs no purification for His own sins (7:26-28)

On the Day of Atonement the High Priest had to sacrifice for His own sins before he offered the sin offering for the people. He was a sinner as they were. Christ, however, is "holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners" (v26).

(iv) It is the reality to which the Levitical priesthood pointed (8:1-5)

These verses are key to our understanding of the Tabernacle and the Old Testament pattern of worship through sacrifice. Those things were a shadow – a picture illustrating the spiritual reality. Christ ministers in the spiritual sanctuary – the dwelling place of God. The Tabernacle was a picture showing that God is sovereign and holy, but Christ is now in the place of holiness and sovereignty.

(v) It is the priesthood of a superior covenant (8:6-13)

We are God's New Covenant people. The people of Israel were His Old Covenant people. Jeremiah (Chapter 31) had a vision from God of a time when He would make a New Covenant that would not be like the Old Covenant. This New Covenant is much greater than the Old because the promises it contains are greater. The Old Covenant promises were that the people of Israel would possess the land of Canaan, that they would be a great nation and that all nations would be blessed through them. The New Covenant promises are that God's Laws would be written on our hearts, God will be our God, and we will all know Him personally, and that our sins will be forgiven so that God will not remember them again (vv10-12). The Old Covenant failed because of the sin of God's people, but the New Covenant finally deals with sins and transforms God's people from the inside out so that our hearts and minds by nature obey His Law.

(vi) His one sacrifice for sins forever really deals with sin (9:1-10:18)

The Old Testament sacrifices could never really deal with the problem of sin (9:9, 10:11) they only made the people ceremonially clean (9:13) so that they could worship God. They were a sign of their faith in God and dependence on Him to forgive them. In fact, the fact that these sacrifices had to be repeated so often was a constant reminder of sin (10:3). The blood of bulls and goats could never take away sins (10:4). Only a human being can die for a human being, and to be a suitable sacrifice that person must be sinless, without defect (like the animals for the Old Testament sacrifices). Only one person could ever be human but also sinless, and that was Christ. His sacrifice could really cleanse our consciences (9:14) and make us perfect (10:14). In fact, His sacrifice also paid for the sins committed under the Old Covenant (9:15 – see Romans 3:25). Abraham and Moses are forgiven on the same basis as you and I – the atoning death of Christ.

(vii) His priesthood makes access to God possible for all Christians (4:14-16; 10:19-25)

The Old Testament priesthood could never make it possible for the ordinary people to enter behind the curtain into the Most holy Place and the very presence of God. In fact, the priests could not even do this – only the High Priest could. But Christ has opened up a "new and living way" (10:20) by His

blood. The curtain in the Temple that separated off the Most Holy Place was torn in two when Christ died (Luke 23:45). Under the New Covenant, under Christ's priesthood, all believers can now have access to God's presence. This is such an immense privilege!

CONCLUSION: Christ's Priesthood Meets Our Need

The fact that Jesus is our High Priest has huge significance for us:

1. Christ's sacrifice put an end to the system of sacrifices

The fact that we no longer need to slaughter animals as part of our worship to God is entirely because of the sacrifice Christ offered for us when He died in our place. Just look at how the writer of Hebrews described the results of Christ's sacrificial death – by it:

- He "provided purification for sins" (1:3)
- He destroyed the devil and set us free from the fear of death (2:14&15)
- He made atonement for our sins (2:17)
- He "obtained eternal redemption" (9:12)
- Our consciences are cleansed so that we can serve the living God (9:14)
- The ransom price is paid to set us free from sins (9:15)
- He bore our sin and did (or took) away with it (9:26-28)
- It was the one sacrifice that could really pay for sins forever (10:11&12)
- It makes us perfect forever (10:14)

No wonder the gospel leaves no room for our effort or works to earn our salvation – our forgiveness is available solely on the basis of the value of Christ's sacrificial death. It is perfectly adequate to completely cleanse us from all our sin. As a result there is no longer any need for the Old Testament system of sacrifices (see Hebrews 10:18 – "there is no longer any sacrifice for sin" means literally that the whole system has become redundant).

To return to the picture we drew at the beginning, Christ has finally bridged the gap between God and us which was caused by our sin. He is the one mediator between man and God, who gave Himself as a ransom for our sins (I Timothy 2:5&6). Like the High Priest in the Old Testament, He entered into the Most Holy Place to sacrifice on our behalf. The fact that He returned alive (risen from the dead) proved that his sacrifice was accepted, and there is truly forgiveness for us. Our sins have been removed from us, and we are free to receive God's mercy and grace.

2. Christ's High Priesthood has lasting results for us:

Christ's ministry as our High priest has results for us in the past, the present and the future:

- **PAST:** our sins are cleansed and our consciences are purified because of His one sacrifice for sins forever (Hebrews 9:14, 10:22). Because Christ lives in God's presence this sacrifice has permanent results. Unlike the Old Testament High priest, who could only go into the Most Holy Place for a limited time one day per year, Christ has entered into the inner sanctuary and remains there on our behalf as a High Priest forever – this is the basis of our certain hope of salvation (Hebrews 6:19&20).
- **PRESENT:** we can boldly approach throne of grace because He is continually living and interceding for us at God's right hand (Hebrews 4:14-16; 10:19-22). So our prayers are acceptable to God and we have boldness to pray to Him because of our High priest. Furthermore, the word used in Hebrews 7:25 and Romans 8:34 to describe Christ's ongoing intercession for us has the apparent meaning of "making specific requests or petitions before someone". In other words, scripture appears to teach that Christ is not only representing us before His Father, but praying specifically for us! The pattern for His prayers for us can be found in His great High-Priestly prayer in John 17 and in His prayer for Peter (Luke 22:32). Louis Berkhof puts it like this:

"It is a consoling thought that Christ is praying for us, even when we are negligent in our prayer life; that He is presenting to the father those spiritual needs which were not present to our minds and which we often neglect to include in our prayers; and that He prays for our protection against the dangers of which we are not even conscious, and against the enemies which threaten us, though we do not notice it. He is praying that our faith may not cease, and that we may come out victoriously in the end".

The dual realities that Christ brings us into God's presence when we pray and that He is there constantly praying for us surround our prayer life, and mean that our lives depend utterly on Christ's continuing intercession for us.

- **FUTURE:** we have a certain hope for the future because our High priest will return to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him (Hebrews 9:28). Because He lives forever to make intercession for us He is able to save us "completely" – from every situation, through every situation, forever (Hebrews 7:25). The complete priestly work of Christ, redeeming us and continually making intercession for us is the only basis for our security, but because of Him we are eternally secure if we are in Christ.

3. Christ our High Priest meets our need

Christ's work as High Priest is relevant to our lives, not just in the abstract sense that we know His death has paid the price for our sins, but in a very real sense in our day to day lives. As we read through Hebrews we discover that in Christ we find all we need. Not only does He meet our need for a perfect sacrifice for sins, but He meets our need when we are:

- **Tempted in our weakness (2:18 & 4:15)**

Christ knows what it is to be human. He was tempted in every way that we are, yet remained sinless. He knows what it is to be hungry, tired, frustrated, rejected, misunderstood, taken for granted, abused, criticised unfairly, slandered and beaten. He entered into our humanity so that He could be a High priest who can bring us to God. Because He is God He knows the heart of God and can sit at His right hand, but because He is man He understands the heart of man and can walk beside us through our darkest hour. When we are tempted to sin, Christ is praying for us, and He will strengthen us to resist if we draw on His power.

- **In need of mercy & grace (4:16)**

Through Christ we discover that God's throne is a throne of grace! The Sovereign of the Universe in all holiness and majesty is longing to pour out blessing into our lives. We look into the face of our judge and see a saviour there. When we fall into sin we need His mercy to forgive and His grace to renew us, and as we come to Him through Christ our High Priest we find all the grace and mercy we need. No wonder the writer tells us we can come "with confidence"!

- **Discouraged & doubting (6:17-20)**

The writer describes our hope as being like an anchor for our souls that goes into the Most Holy Place, behind the curtain, where Christ our forerunner had entered for us. Because Christ our High priest lives for ever and is already in the very presence of God, and we are united with Him, we too will follow. When we doubt or are discouraged, we can look to Him and be "greatly encouraged". Christ alone is the basis of our hope – we don't depend on our own goodness or works to keep us, but on His eternal life and the position He has secured for us.

- **Accused by Satan (2:14-15)**

Satan will try to accuse us and tell us that we are no good, not worthy, and God can never use us or do anything with us. Of course, it's true that we aren't worthy, but who ever told you that you could be saved because of your own worth? Of course not! It is because Christ has crushed Satan's power, and robbed him of the one thing that he had over us, the power of death. Christ is the victor, and death has no more claim over him or over us if we are His. When Satan accuses, we can look to our High priest and rejoice that the lies of the evil one are hollow. We need not be subject again to fear! As Paul states it in Romans 8, "Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us" (Romans 8:34).

- **Wearied by opposition (12:3)**

When we face opposition from sinful men in our journey of faith, we can look to Christ, the author and perfecter of our faith, who endured the cross and now is seated at God's right hand. As we see our High Priest seated there we will find an example and a great hope that will enable us to endure without growing weary or losing hope.

4. We share in Christ's priestly ministry

Christ is our High priest, but in the Old Testament a whole tribe within the nation of Israel were priests. Under the New Covenant do we have a priesthood? The answer is yes – there is a priesthood under the New Covenant, but that it is no longer limited to a select group from among the people. In the New Covenant we are **all** priests. This means three things:

- a. *We all have access to the presence of God by the blood of Jesus* (Ephesians 2:18; Hebrews 10:19, 22) – we no longer need a human priest to mediate for us because we are in Christ and He is in the Most Holy Place forever.
- b. *We bring spiritual sacrifices to Him* – our sacrifices are our bodies, praise, good deeds and sharing with others (Romans 12:1; Hebrews 13:15&16; I Peter 2:5).
- c. *We bring others to Him* – we intercede for others in prayer (I Timothy 2:1&2) and witness to others who do not know Him (I Peter 2:9).

I trust as you read this that you have come to trust in Christ as your great High Priest and the one sacrifice for your sins. If you haven't, what will you say to God when you face Him? Why should He accept you? If you have, rejoice in His constant intercession for you, and serve Him in your office as a priest of God!

3. Jesus the King (Hebrews 1:5-2:10 & 12:22-29)

"He ... provided purification for sins" (Hebrews 1:3)

Key Message: Christ our King brings us to glory

INTRODUCTION: Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité

"Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" – that was the cry of the French Revolution (1789-99). Those three words summarise the aspirations of the age of modernity: that all men would be free from oppressive regimes, treated as equal before the Law and as brothers on the basis of shared humanity. The Statue of Liberty in New York harbour (full title "Liberty Enlightening the World") was a symbol of these values donated by France to mark the centenary of the American Revolution in 1886. Of course, the revolution in France soon became a regime arguably more oppressive than any before in the period of the "Terror", but the philosophy of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" carried on, and has great influence in our thinking about society today with our enshrinement of human rights. Not many people would argue for a return to the days of absolute monarchy – we are far too distrusting of any human individual to invest that much power in them. Most people in the street would agree whole-heartedly to the idea of equality in employment and educational opportunity – after all, we are all born equal as human beings, and we have dignity because of that. And most people would agree that we are a brotherhood, despite the cultural, ethnic and religious differences we face – one human race. As Christians, however, we will need to be careful to analyse these assumptions and probe beneath them to the deeper questions of why we long for liberty, equality and fraternity and how we can hope to have this human dignity. And furthermore, is there any human being from whom we should not seek to be free, with whom we can never claim to be equal and who is not our brother?

BACKGROUND: THE OLD TESTAMENT KINGS

GOD THE SOVEREIGN KING

The Old Testament presents God as "the King of Glory" (Psalm 24:8), "the great God, the great King above all Gods" (Psalm 95:3) and the LORD who is "enthroned as King forever" (Psalm 29:10). Scripture is consistent in its claim that He is all powerful, all knowing, all present, and that He is the Sovereign King over all creation and over all the kingdoms of this earth (see Daniel 4:17, 25, 32; 5:21).

People sometimes struggle with the idea of God's Kingdom and His sovereign power. In particular, the question is often raised of how this idea fits with our free will. If God is sovereign and has all power, does that mean that our choices are not real choices? The following illustration by AW Tozer is helpful in thinking this question through:

An ocean liner leaves New York bound for Liverpool. Its destination has been determined by proper authorities. Nothing can change it. This is at least a faint picture of sovereignty. On board the liner are scores of passengers. These are not in chains, neither are their activities determined for them by decree. They are completely free to move about as they will. They eat, sleep, play, lounge about on the deck, read, talk, altogether as they please; but all the while the great liner is carrying them steadily onward toward a predetermined port. Both freedom and sovereignty are present here, and they do not contradict. So it is, I believe, with man's freedom and the sovereignty of God. The mighty liner of God's sovereign design keeps its steady course over the sea of history.

This picture fits very well with the Biblical teaching. God does have His sovereign design for human history, and His purposes for our life, but within certain limits He gives us great freedom to make choices. These limits include the limitations of the laws of nature, the opinions and wills of other individuals, the constraints of our society and the limitations of our own abilities and resourcefulness. In fact, the non-Christian is never completely "free", so that the idea of "free will" is a misnomer. The reality is that without Christ we are slaves to sin and we find ourselves incapable to make choices free from the pull of the sinful nature. It is only in Christ that we can have the freedom to fulfil our God-given potential.

God does not force us to follow His will, like a despotic dictator, but calls us to walk with Him. His ultimate purpose for mankind and for the Universe cannot and will not be thwarted, but in our every day choices we can make right and wrong, wise and foolish choices. Not only this, but even within God's will for us He often allows us freedom to choose between various choices. In other words, in many decisions there may not be one right choice, with all the others being wrong, but several right choices through all of which God can bless us and accomplish His purpose for His glory. This is certainly true of minor decisions such as which shirt I will wear today or whether I will shop at one supermarket or another, but I would argue that it is also true of many larger decisions, such as who we will marry or what career we will follow. Of course, we must be constantly listening to God, discerning His voice and calling on our lives, but if we are sincerely listening and eager to do His will and He does not make one choice clear to us as His will, I believe that as long as we avoid a foolish choice He is allowing us freedom to choose for ourselves and will bless us in whichever path we choose. Growing to Christian maturity includes developing a godly mind full of wisdom that will learn to make choices in

a God-honouring way (see Romans 12:1-3). This includes discovering our unique spiritual gifts, passions, natural abilities, personality type and experiences that shape who we are and seeking guidance through scripture, prayer, the inner prompting of the Spirit and the advice of wise people. Then we will be able to discern in the maze of circumstances that confront us what is God's good, perfect and pleasing will.

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE KINGS OF ISRAEL

Under Moses in the desert

After the nation of Israel came out of Egypt under Moses' leadership, they travelled for 40 years in the desert. During this time God gave Moses instructions for the people about how they should appoint a king after they entered the land of Canaan when they decided they wanted one (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). These instructions included the following points:

1. The King must be chosen by God (v15)
2. The King must be from the nation of Israel (v15)
3. The King must not have large numbers of horses, many wives or much wealth so that his heart would not be led astray (vv16&17)
4. The King must write his own copy of the Law and keep it with Him, reading it regularly – in other words, his rule must be based on God's Law (vv18&19)
5. The King must not consider Himself better than the common people (v20)

These instructions are a remarkably clear limitation on the power of the King. He was not to be an absolute monarch, removed from the people and unaccountable to anyone. He was not to abuse his power to indulge himself. He was, in effect, to be a vice-regent under God. It is unclear from Scripture whether God was in favour of the nation taking a king or whether this was simply a concession He made to them. I would argue that it was the latter, and that God intended the people to recognise Him as their King, while priests and Judges would administer His Law on his behalf.

The time of Joshua & the Judges

Eventually, under the leadership of Joshua, the nation entered the land of Canaan in around 1405 BC. After Joshua died in around 1380 BC, the nation was leaderless, and the people began to forget God and to worship the Canaanite gods. Over the following 330 years the nation entered into a cycle of repeated sin and disobedience. When the Israelites disobeyed God, He allowed the other nations of Canaan to dominate and oppress them. However, each time they people called out to God to save them, God showed His grace by raising up a ruler (Judge) to defeat their enemies and rescue them. The writer of Judges summarises this period of history with the sentence, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit" (Judges 21:25). Sadly, the people kept on rejecting God's Law, and in the absence of a strong leader to guide them they wandered away from God.

Israel demands a King

Eventually the nation decided that they wanted to have their own king. They were jealous of the other nations and thought that they would be more secure and successful if they had king as a king would unite them. They came to the last Judge, Samuel, and insisted that he should give them a king (I Samuel Chapter 8). This request for a king was actually a rejection of God, because they were looking for a king to be the source of their strength instead of trusting in Him to protect them. Their weakness as a nation was not because they had no king but because they had disobeyed God. Samuel asked God for His guidance. God told him that the people were actually rejecting Him as their King, and told Samuel to warn them how a king would be able to oppress them by making himself rich from their hard work. Samuel told the leaders of Israel, but they still insisted on having a king, and so God told Samuel to give them a king. Actually, God's warning to the people in I Samuel 8:11-17 of how a King would oppress them and make himself rich on the produce of their labour reads like an argument against the concept of absolute monarchy.

The United Monarchy – Saul, David & Solomon

Unfortunately, the monarchy, far from saving Israel from the corruption of Samuel's sons (as the people had apparently hoped), ultimately led them further into sin and idolatry. The first King, Saul, began well, but later disobeyed God and was rejected by Him. David followed, and became the founder of a great dynasty. Furthermore, he was the archetypical King – the one whose rule would set the pattern for a greater coming Kingdom, and the one who would become the ancestor of the Messiah. David was far from perfect (in fact it has been said that he literally broke every one of the 10 commandments), but God's verdict on his life was that he was "a man after my own heart" (Acts 13:22). How could God come to this conclusion? The psalms of David give us great insight into his heart and the intimacy of his relationship with God. They speak from despair and joy, from times of trouble and times of blessing, in tones of praise and of doubt, but they reflect David's constant trust in God as his hope and his rock. David was a man of faith and a man who repented sincerely for his sin (Psalm 51) and he obeyed God and reigned under His Sovereign guidance. His kingdom brought unity and peace to Israel, finally conquering some of their most longstanding enemies. It paved the

way for an unprecedented period of peace and prosperity during the reign of his son Solomon, who was perhaps the richest man in the world at that time and was gifted by God with great wisdom (see . At the height of Solomon's reign the nation of Israel was at its most powerful and wealthy. They lived at peace in the land God had given them, worshipping Him in the Temple where His presence and glory were and enjoying His blessings. Other nations (e.g. the Queen of Sheba – I Kings 10:1-13) glorified God because of Israel's prosperity and Solomon's wisdom. Solomon's reign started well, but he had a great weakness – he loved and married many foreign women – exactly what God had warned about in Deuteronomy 17. God therefore decided to judge him, but for David's sake He promised to wait until after Solomon's death, when He would divide the nation leaving only a minority under Solomon's son (I Kings 11:9-13).

The Divided Kingdom, Exile & Return

After Solomon's death the nation did indeed split into two. The 10 northern tribes rejected the harsh taxation policy Solomon had enforced and that his son Rehoboam intended to continue. They formed the northern kingdom of Israel, while the other two tribes formed the Kingdom of Judah, which continued to be ruled by David's dynasty. When the king was godly, the nation tended to be godly, but when the king rejected God the whole nation followed him into idolatry, immorality and social injustice. Over time the number of righteous kings became less and the sinfulness of the kings became worse. Eventually, God judged the nation by exiling the northern Kingdom of Israel to Assyria (around 722BC) and the southern Kingdom of Judah to Babylonia (around 586BC). After the return from Exile under Ezra and Nehemiah, David's descendant (Zerubbabel) did not resume the kingship.

The Prophetic Hope – A King on David's Throne

The Old Testament Kings were never able to fulfil the potential glory of their office, and the prophets consistently looked forward to a coming descendant of David who would reign on his throne and would bring justice and glory to God's people (see for example Isaiah 9:2-7 and 11:1-16). The kingdom of this "Root of Jesse" would be glorious and full of peace. He would reign over Israel, but His Kingdom would spread and fill the whole earth (Daniel 2:44; 7:27).

CHRIST THE KING

The New Testament leaves us in no doubt that Jesus is the fulfilment of the hope of the coming King in the line of David:

GOSPELS

In all the gospels Jesus central message was that the Kingdom of God had arrived with His coming (e.g. Matthew 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 4:43; John 3:3-5). The title "son of David" was used 17 times in the gospels of Jesus. This title identifies Him as the descendant of David who would fulfil the Old Testament hope.

- Matthew's gospel is particularly occupied with the theme of Jesus as King of the Jews since it was written to Jewish believers, for example:
 - The genealogy of Jesus shows he is the descendant of David (1:1-17)
 - The record of the visit of the Magi highlights the birth of the King (2:1-12)
 - Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven emphasises the hope of the coming Kingdom (e.g. 5:1-7:29 and the "Kingdom parables" of Chapter 13)
 - In 27:11 Jesus openly confesses to being the King of the Jews – the inscription is later written over His cross (27:37)
- Mark (15:2) and Luke (23:3) also record Jesus confessing to being the King of the Jews during His trial.
- John records Jesus telling Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world, but for now being from another place (18:33-37). He refused to let the people make Him king during His ministry (6:15).

ACTS & THE EPISTLES

In the book of Acts, the apostles continued to proclaim the Kingdom of God (Acts 28:31). They did not apparently refer to Jesus as "King Jesus" in their preaching, or speak directly of Him as a King, perhaps because they continued to emphasise submission to earthly authorities during this age before Christ's return (Romans 13; I Peter 2:17). The epistles refer to Jesus being set far above "all rule and authority, power and dominion" (Ephesians 1:20-22) and sitting at God's right hand (see below).

REVELATION

Revelation reveals Jesus, the lamb as the "Lord of Lords and King of kings" (17:14, 19:16), a title used of God by Paul (I Timothy 6:15) – in other words the one whose Kingdom will fill the earth, who is sovereign over all other lords and kings.

CHRIST'S KINGDOM – NOW OR FUTURE?

Christians have differing views about the Kingdom of Christ. The main discussions centre around the understanding of the book of Revelation (how literally should it be understood?) and the question of whether

Christ will reign in person on this earth, and if He will what exactly will happen before that time. The differing positions can best be described by their view about a 1000 year period ("millennium") mentioned in Revelation Chapter 20. Our intention here is not to fully examine these different positions, but it is worth mentioning them briefly together with some comments on their relative strengths and weaknesses:

A] Amillennialism

This position holds that there is no literal 1000 year period of Christ's rule (the prefix "a-" means "no"), and this period is figurative, representing the whole period from Christ's resurrection until He returns in person. People who take this view emphasise the Sovereignty of Christ now and expect Him to come back in person to bring about the final judgement and usher in the eternal state. This return could occur at any time, and will be one decisive event, signalling the end of the Church Age and the beginning of the eternal state. Amillennialists believe the church will always be in a minority in the world, but that there will not necessarily be a worsening of the world situation before Christ's return. The Amillennial position suggests that the period of "great tribulation" (NIV "distress") before Christ's return (see Matthew 24:1-35) began in AD 70 when the Romans conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple and extends right throughout the Church Age.

Weaknesses: Proponents of Amillennialism have potentially been guilty of being too dismissive of details such as the figure of one thousand years and the descriptions of the Kingdom in Old Testament prophecy. They have perhaps been too being ready to see them as entirely figurative and not at all literal. In particular it is difficult to understand Revelation 20:1-6, which speaks of Satan being bound and of a first resurrection of those who have been martyred for their faith, in light of an Amillennial position. It is difficult to see how either of these facts could refer to the present Church Age during which Satan is very active (I Peter 5:8). They are also potentially guilty of failing to distinguish fully between Israel and the Church, seeing the Church as a continuation of Israel (a position the apostle Paul did not apparently share – see Romans 9-11).

Strengths: On the other hand, the Amillennial position has strengths in that it emphasises the Scriptural truth that Christ's Kingdom is here now in the present age. It also has a high view of Scripture.

B] Postmillennialism

This position claims that the Church will grow in influence and size until it is able to set up the Kingdom of Christ on earth and that only after this will He return to rule in person (the prefix "post-" means "after"). The "millennium" is figurative of the influence of the church over the political systems of the world. People who take this view are optimistic about the future, expecting the gospel to continue to spread and the church to grow and gain increasing influence. Postmillennialism sees the "great tribulation" as having been fulfilled in the events of AD 70.

Weaknesses: The Postmillennial position would appear to be the least sustainable on the basis of Scripture. The New Testament writers do not appear to expect the Church to take over the world, or for there to be righteousness on this earth until Christ returns (see II Thessalonians 2:3&4 and II Timothy 3 for example) – in fact Christ Himself seems to have expected the Church to remain a minority until His return (see Matthew 7:13&14; Matthew 24:21-30; Luke 18:8).

Strengths: On the other hand, the Postmillennial position is strong in its emphasis on the need for Christians to influence the society we live for good and work towards greater social justice. These ideas are important in Scripture, and have often been neglected by holders of the other positions.

C] Premillennialism

This position teaches that there will be a literal personal rule of Christ on this earth (most would see the 1000 year figure as being literal), and that Christ must come again in person to the earth before this happens (the prefix "pre-" means "before"). This view divides into two groups:

- **"Pretribulational" or "Dispensational" Premillennialists** – believe that there are two distinct returns of Christ. In the first one Christians will be removed from the earth (this is called the "Rapture" – see I Thessalonians 4:17). The Rapture will be at a secret coming of Christ, and unbelievers will not see Him. After the Rapture an individual known as the "Beast" will take control of the political and religious systems of the world and will reign for either 3.5 or 7 years (these periods are taken from Daniel's prophecy of 70 weeks of years in Daniel 9:20-27 and the reference to the period of rule of the "Beast" in Revelation 13:5) which is identified with the "great tribulation" of Matthew 24. After this Christ returns a second time in glory to destroy him and begin His millennial Kingdom, during which Satan will be bound. After the millennium Satan will be released and there will be one final rebellion of human beings before the last judgement and the formation of the new earth. This view sees the period of Tribulation and the millennial Kingdom as having particular relevance for Israel, since the church will not be on earth. During the Tribulation many Jewish people will accept Christ as their Messiah.
- **"Classic" or "Historic" Premillennialists** – believe that the "great tribulation" will occur before Christ returns, and that the Church will endure it. This variation of Premillennialism does not see two distinct

returns of Christ, but believes that the "Rapture" of Christians described in I Thessalonians 4:17 will be a visible, public event when they join Him in the air just before He descends to reign on the earth.

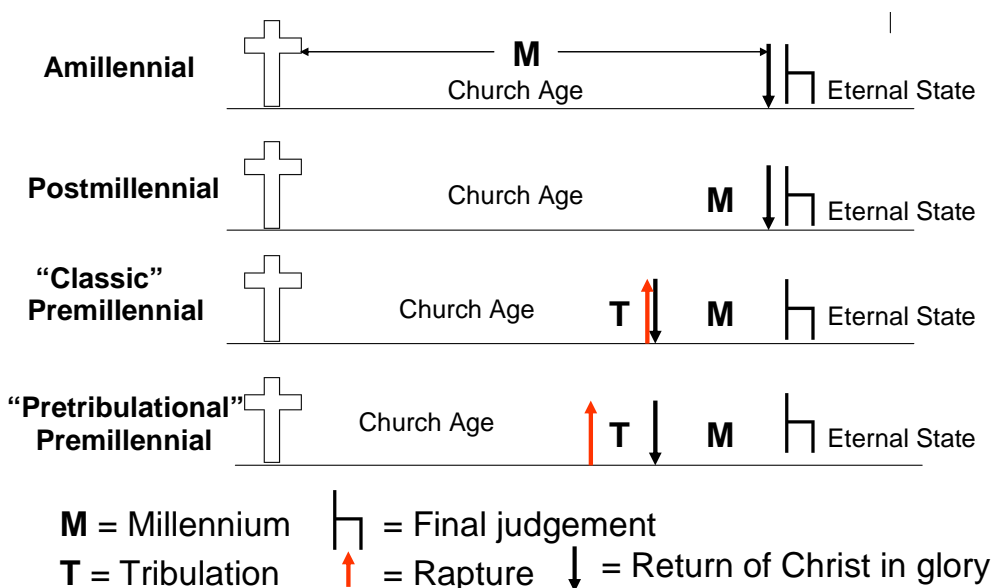
Weaknesses: The Premillennialist position can be guilty of taking parts of Revelation too literally, and of putting an excessive stress on trying to understand every detail of the end times. Some Pretribulationist Premillennialists have also been guilty of placing such emphasis on the Millennium as the perfect expression of God's Kingdom on this earth that they have neglected much of Jesus' teaching (the Sermon on the Mount, for example, is for that time, not ours), and have limited the gospel to a narrow view of getting saved before it's too late instead of the full implications of social justice.

Strengths: On the other hand, the Premillennialist position does have a high view of Scripture, and correctly understands that Christ's Kingdom is not here and cannot be here in full until He personally returns in glory. It is perhaps the only adequate explanation of Revelation 20 and the only view that does justice to the Old Testament passages that speak of a state of greater peace than the present age but something less than the eternal perfection (e.g. Psalm 72:8-14; Isaiah 11:6-11; 65:20; Zechariah 14:5-17).

Conclusion:

In balance I believe that the "Classic Premillennialism" position has a great deal of merit and probably represents the most complete understanding of Scripture. However, we must be careful about taking passages in Revelation too literally and should not spend great amounts of time on trying to understand every detail of the end times. Most importantly we must be careful not to let differences in our understanding of these details become a cause of division – it is sufficient to know that we all believe that Christ will return one day and that the destiny of this universe is ultimately in His hands. The overall thrust of Revelation (as of the whole New Testament) is that Christ will return, and that when He returns He will be victorious. His Kingdom exists now in this world in that He is sovereign over all authorities, and His New Covenant people (the Church) recognise His Lordship, but it will not be revealed in its fullness until He returns in person to judge the nations. This truth of the "now but not yet" Kingdom of Christ is clear in Hebrews, as it is throughout the New Testament.

	Millennium (Revelation 20)	Great Tribulation (Matthew 24)	Return of Christ
Amillennialism	A figurative term for the whole Church Age when Christ is reigning over all power and authority.	Began in AD 70 and extends throughout the Church Age (persecution of Christians)	One decisive return in glory at the end of the Church Age followed by the final judgement and the beginning of the eternal state.
Postmillennialism	A period of great influence of the church over human government and society at the end of the Church Age. The figure of 1000 years may or may not be literal.	Refers to the events of AD 70.	One decisive return in glory at the end of the Millennium followed by the final judgement and the beginning of the eternal state.
"Classic" Premillennialism	A period when Christ reigns in person on this earth before the final judgement. The figure of 1000 years is probably literal.	A period of great persecution of Christians at the end of the Church Age.	One decisive return in glory at the end of the Church Age followed by His millennium reign on this earth.
"Pretribulationist" Premillennialism	A period of 1000 years when Christ reigns in person on this earth before the final judgement.	A period of 7 (or 3.5) years after the Rapture of Christians out of the world and before Christ returns in glory.	An initial secret return to the sky to Rapture His people before the Great Tribulation, and a later return in glory to the earth after the Great Tribulation.



THE KINGDOM IN HEBREWS

Although Hebrews never describes Christ as a King, it does talk about Him reigning, and it describes the Kingdom over which He will rule. There are five important truths in understanding what Hebrews teaches about Christ as King:

A] God's throne is a throne of grace (4:16)

To appreciate Christ's Kingship, we must appreciate first what kind of Kingdom He presides over. The phrase "throne of grace" sums it up beautifully. Christ's rule is a rule of grace – in other words He pours out gifts and blessings on His subjects. Of course, grace is not a weak thing, and His kingship is certainly not weak. In fact our English phrase for a person who rules firmly over others is to rule "with a rod of iron", and that is a direct quote from the KJV reading of Psalm 2:9, which speaks of Christ's rule over the nations. His power is absolute – His rule is firm. Yet in Christ we discover that it is possible for an absolute ruler to be a truly benevolent and kind ruler. He is the fulfilment of our hopes for one who will hold both authority and power and mercy and kindness in His hand. He is the perfect meeting place of grace and truth. He, and only He, can be trusted to hold the reigns of power over the entire created order!

B] Christ is enthroned at God's right hand (1:3; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2)

These two verses teach one truth, that Christ is now sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on High. The right hand is the position of greatest honour (see for example the request of the mother of James and John for them to sit on either side of Christ in His Kingdom). In addition to the four references in Hebrews, there are 7 other references to Christ being at God's right hand in the New Testament:

- Matthew 26:64 – Jesus told the Sanhedrin during His trial that they would see Him "sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of the heaven".
- Acts 5:31 – Peter and the apostles testified to the Sanhedrin that Jesus had been exalted by God "to his own right hand as Prince and Saviour"
- Acts 7:55&56 – Stephen, filled with the Holy Spirit, had a vision into Heaven and saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God
- Romans 8:34 – Christ is "at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us"
- Ephesians 1:20-22 – Christ has been seated at God's right hand "in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given ... And God placed all things under His feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church".
- Colossians 3:1 – Paul exhorts us to set our hearts in things above, "where Christ is seated at the right hand of God"
- I Peter 3:22 – Peter says that Christ "has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand – with angels, authorities and powers in submission to Him".

The message here is clear. Christ, the anointed king, rules over every other authority and power in the created universe. He shares His Father's position of Sovereignty. In other words, He is in the place of Sovereignty over the entire Universe at the right hand of His Father in heaven. He currently possesses the place of highest honour, at the right hand of God. This truth is clear in Psalm 110, the same psalm in which David prophesied about the priest in the order of Melchizedek, where he says: "The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'".

C] Christ is bringing many sons to glory (2:5-15)

This passage centres around a quotation from Psalm 8 (in verses 6-8). That Psalm speaks about the position of man in the created order – made a little lower than the angels, but crowned with glory and honour so that man can rule over the earth under God ("and put everything under his feet"). But then the author makes an observation – the reality is that the created order is not subject to man's dominion (v8b). Man has fallen from the position of dominion God intended for him and is now less than he should be. Then the focus changes to Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels (when He became human), now crowned with glory and honour (v9). He died in obedience to His Father and in His resurrection and ascension He now occupies the place of glory and honour that man should have possessed. He has restored mankind to the dignity God intended for us. But more than this, because He tasted death for everyone He is able to bring many sons to glory with Him (vv9&10). Christ is not ashamed to call us His brothers (v11), and He has made it possible for us to be liberated from slavery to our fear of death (v15) back to the position of dominion Adam and Eve had before the Fall. Because Christ is our King and our "brother", we are brought to glory with Him.

D] Christ will return to bring salvation to those who await Him (9:28)

Our present hope depends on His continued priesthood. Because He lives forever, He keeps us secure in Him, and saves us completely (7:25). Christ is now in the position of ultimate authority in the Universe, but not everything is subject to Him yet (2:8) and not all of His enemies have been made His footstool yet (10:13). The last enemy that will be defeated is death (I Corinthians 15:25&26). This will not happen until

Christ returns a second time – on that day will come the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:22-25). This reality is vital for us to understand. The Kingdom of Christ is now but not yet – while we live in this fallen world we are subject to disease, suffering and death, but when He returns He will return to bring us salvation in its final form – from the presence of sin to be with Him in the presence of God – this will include the redemption of our bodies, which will be free from the effects of sin.

E] Christ's Kingdom is Unshakeable (12:22-29)

In this amazing passage the writer contrasts Christ's Kingdom (the Kingdom we are receiving) with the shadow of God's Kingdom found in the Old Covenant under Moses. While Moses and the people of Israel came to a physical mountain, we have come to the spiritual reality. That mountain shook when God spoke (v26), but the Kingdom we receive cannot be shaken (v28). This Kingdom consists of:

- (i) Mount Zion – the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God (we come to the real dwelling place of God of which Jerusalem with its Temple was a picture.
- (ii) Thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly
- (iii) The church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven – the Church belongs to Christ, and our names are written in God's presence.
- (iv) God, the judge of all men
- (v) Spirits of righteous men made perfect
- (vi) Jesus the mediator of a new covenant
- (vii) The sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the word of Abel

We are receiving an unshakeable Kingdom because of Christ's blood shed for us – His one sacrifice for sins forever. This passage is really about judgement. One day God ("the judge of all men") will finally judge this Universe, and on that day the whole Universe will be shaken (v26-27) – only the unshakeable Kingdom will remain!

So, then, according to Hebrews Christ is King. His Kingdom is here now, because He is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High, but it is not yet here in its fullness. For now Christ is bringing many sons to glory to share in the victory He has won and to reign with Him, but only on the future day of judgement will God shake the Universe and leave only His eternal Kingdom standing. The Kingdom is now but not yet.

CONCLUSION: CHRIST OUR KING BRINGS US TO GLORY

The fact that Christ is King has real impact on our lives:

1. We submit gladly to Christ's Lordship over us

What kind of King is Christ? To return to our initial question about the cry of "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity", how does Christ's office as King relate to these common desires of mankind? Firstly, with Christ we **do** have fraternity. He calls us His brothers and lifts us to the dignity God intended us to have – together we are brothers and sisters in Christ. Secondly, in Him we do have equality – not with Him (for He is the only begotten Son), but with one another. We share in the blessings of His position in our relationship with God as our Father, and distinctions of race, culture, sex and social standing become insignificant (see Galatians 3:36-4:7). And in Christ we have liberty. But here we must make a distinction and say that this liberty is not the freedom to do as we want but the freedom to enjoy God's best purpose for us. Christ has set us free from slavery to the Law (Galatians 4:2-5), to sin (Romans 6:17&18) and to the fear of death (Hebrews 2:15). But He has set us free not so that we can go back to our old slave masters, but so that we can become slaves to righteousness, living lives led by the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5). We discover then that it is only by submitting ourselves to Christ's rule that we can have real liberty, real equality, and real fraternity. We are the new humanity, but only because we are in Christ! Why then would we willingly return aspects of our lives to the principles that once held us as slaves? We must continue to submit to His Lordship in every area of our lives. His yoke (a symbol of kingly authority – see I Kings 12) is easy, and His burden is light (Matthew 11:29&30). He is the most gracious, righteous and merciful of Kings, and in His majesty He will ride forth on behalf of truth, humility and righteousness (Psalm 45:4). Let us surrender to Him and make His mission our mission too!

2. We see Christ's "now but not yet" Kingdom & it defines our world-view

A world-view is the description of how you understand the world you live in. For us as Christians, our world-view is defined by the reality of Christ's "now but not yet" Kingdom. It is very important that we understand the principle of "now but not yet" as it will avoid many misunderstandings in our lives and will help us to trust in God through every circumstance. The "now but not yet" Kingdom of God shapes our:

- **POLITICS:** We don't expect God's Kingdom to come in its fullness on this earth until Christ returns in person. Hence we rejoice that all authority is subject to Christ, but we do not try to bring His Kingdom to reign over others in this world by force. We will seek to influence politics positively for God's

Kingdom, but we will not seek to use it to usher in his Kingdom in its fullness, since that cannot come without His personal return.

- **SPIRITUAL WARFARE:** We understand that there is a spiritual warfare in our world – that Christ is Sovereign over all, but the powers of darkness are not fully in submission to Him yet and can still work in our world. These forces must be fought, but we are not seeking to bring Christ's dominion since He is already Sovereign. In His power and authority we can stand and win the battle over Satan and the powers of darkness because we know that while the battle continues, the war has already been won. We can face and fight "against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 6:12). When Christ returns in glory there will be no doubt about the outcome!
- **SUFFERING:** When we suffer we have the hope of the future fulfilment of His Kingdom. Whether in the Millennium on this earth or in the New Earth, the Old Testament prophecies about great peace and blessing and freedom from disease and war will be fulfilled. We don't expect miracles to be the norm of this age, because the Kingdom is not revealed in its fullness (we may be healed in this age, but we may not).
- **VALUES:** We live now as citizens of God's Kingdom as we look forward to the hope of the coming of Christ (Philippians 3:20). As a result we are strangers and aliens in this world (I Peter 2:11). The way we live our lives must reflect the reality of Christ's Lordship over us. When we face rejection by this world we can rejoice because we belong to God's Kingdom. When we face temptation to fit into the pattern of this world, we will instead seek to offer our bodies afresh to God as a living sacrifice so that our minds can be transformed and we can accomplish His good, pleasing and perfect will instead (Romans 12:1-3). Our prayer is that His Kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:10). That request in itself has the tension between now and not yet – now His Kingdom is here in our lives, and our mission is to be the answer to our own prayer (that in our sphere of influence we would make this world more like His Kingdom), but it is also "not yet", and as we pray we express our longing for the day when he returns to establish His Kingdom in all its glory and fullness. What a day that will be!

3. We share in Christ's ministry as King

Because we have been united with Christ, we have already been seated in the heavenly places with Christ (Ephesians 2:6) and in the future we will reign with Christ, sharing in His position of Kingly authority (Revelation 22:5). It is difficult for us to imagine exactly what this amazing destiny will be, but the reality is that we will be God's appointed rulers over the new creation of God. He is restoring us to the full dignity of mankind, undoing the effects of the Fall. We now share in His new humanity because He is not ashamed to call us brothers (Hebrews 2:11). We are the captives who were led in His train in His ascension (Ephesians 4:8) – the sons he is bringing to glory (Hebrews 2:10). If we are part of His eternal Kingdom we cannot be shaken, whatever the world throws at us, and we will not be shaken even on the future day of God's judgement when the whole Universe is shaken by Him. Christian brother or sister, do you realise what you now are? Christ's ministry as King is not that of a cruel and selfish dictator, but of a gracious, benevolent all-powerful majestic sovereign who in His majesty lifts His subjects to higher heights. In Him we are transformed to the fully dignified thing that we were intended to be – the sons of God – and all of creation is eagerly awaiting our day if unveiling (Romans 8:18&19). Never be fooled into thinking you are just another ordinary person, a nobody, an insignificant, unremarkable individual. You are the most splendid thing in all the universe! Now be free and live the life Christ died to give you!

SUMMARY OF SERIES:

Jesus Christ (Jesus the "anointed one") has fulfilled perfectly the three great Old Testament offices of Prophet, Priest and King. In fact, these offices pointed to Him as their fulfilment, and can be seen as types of the perfect Prophet, Priest and King who would come. Louis Berkhof has written:

"As Prophet, He represents God with Man,
as Priest, He represents man in the presence of God,
and as King He exercises dominion and restores the original dominion of Man".

James Benjamin Green describes it more in terms of the results for Christians:

"As prophet he meets the problem of man's ignorance, supplying him with knowledge.
As priest he meets the problem of man's guilt, supplying him with righteousness.

As king he meets the problem of man's weakness and dependence, supplying him with power and protection".

We could add to this and say that Christ as:

- a) **Prophet** – has made God known perfectly to man – the mediator between God and man
- b) **Priest** – has dealt with sin and brought us to God – the mediator between man and God
- c) **King** – rules over all authority and brings many sons to glory – the mediator between man and man

Christ alone could fulfil these roles because He was both God and man, the "radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of His being" (Hebrews 1:3) and the One who "shared in their humanity" (Hebrews 2:14). As God He was sinless and sovereign, as man he could suffer and sympathise with us. In Him mankind is raised again to the position God intended – our dignity is renewed, and our dominion is restored. We who are in Christ are also:

- a) **Prophets** – we declare God's truth to the nations
- b) **Priests** – we offer spiritual sacrifices to Him and approach His throne of grace with confidence
- c) **Kings** – we will reign with Him

Peter sums up these three roles in his wonderful :

"you are a chosen people, a **royal priesthood**, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, **that you may declare** the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." (1 Peter 2:9)

	Christ's office	Result for us	Mediation between	Our role
Prophet	He revealed God perfectly to us – He is the Word of God incarnate	He meets our ignorance with knowledge of God	God & man	He commissions us to declare His praises to the world
Priest	He made one sacrifice for sins forever & now lives forever to intercede	He meets our sin with forgiveness & righteousness	Man & God	He opens the way for us to bring spiritual sacrifices to God
King	All authority and power are subject to Him. His Kingdom is now but not yet	He meets our weakness with power & protection	Man & man	He brings us to glory. We will reign with Him

What a privilege and destiny is ours. What a wonderful purpose we have now in this world, and what a wonderful mediator we have in Christ!