
The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

Hebrews 1:4-5

4 having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. 5 For to which of the angels did He ever say, “YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU”? And again, “I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME”?

There is a great and growing fascination among Americans with angels. A poll taken not too many years back indicated that that some 70% of Americans believe in angels. This coupled with all the angelic merchandising has equated into a very lucrative business for many entrepreneurs. It is nearly impossible to walk into gift shops and bookstores, both Christian and non-Christian, and not find some book, some trinket or picture that promotes the excellencies of angels. Even TV and Hollywood have gotten into the act with shows like “Highway to Heaven,” “Touched by an Angel,” and movies like “Michael” which portrays the holiness and awesomeness of angels in a very poor light.

In truth, angels are grand and awesome beings, created by God to worship and glorify Him, to communicate His messages to man, to minister to His people, and to serve as God’s agents in the final earthly judgments. Unlike the way angels are often portrayed to us today, Biblical angels are fearsome, powerful creatures. In commenting on how poorly angels are depicted today, C.S. Lewis once noted:

Fra Angelico’s angels carry in their face and gesture the peace and authority of Heaven. Later come the chubby infantile nudes of Raphael; finally the soft, slim, girlish, and consolatory angels of nineteenth century art, shapes so feminine that they avoid being voluptuous only by their total insipidity... They are a pernicious symbol. In the Scripture the visitation of an angel is always alarming; it has to begin by saying “Fear not.” The Victorian angel looks as if it were going to say, “There, there.”

If we were to take just a moment to review the fearsomeness of angels in the Scriptures we might turn to Isaiah 6 and consider Isaiah’s vision of the Lord high and exalted in the Temple. There Isaiah, although overwhelmed by the vision of the LORD, seems also taken back by the vision of two “seraphim” (literally, “burning ones”) whose appearance was somewhat insect like with three pairs of wings; two of which covered their faces, two covered their feet and the other two beat intensely in the air while they uttered what is called the *tris hagon* (the three holies), bellowing out “*qadosh, qadosh, qadosh*” – or Holy, Holy, Holy.

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

This cry of the seraphim absolutely shook the very foundations of where Isaiah stood and the temple began to fill with smoke as these “burning ones” made their utterance. Is it no wonder why Isaiah next reveals his absolute trauma, declaring “*Woe is me, for I am ruined!*” (v. 5).

Angels are mentioned in the Old Testament some 100 times and over 160 times in the New Testament. Most of the time they are invisible to the human eye as was the experience of Balaam who had to have his “spiritual eyes” opened to see the angel who blocked his way. Or like Elisha’s servant in 2 Kings 6:17 who had his eyes opened so that he could see he was being protected by a vast army of angelic beings in chariots of fire. When men see angels, they often take on human appearance as was the case with Abraham and Lot in Genesis 18-19. According to the author of Hebrews in chapter 13:2 says that many have entertained angels unaware.

Even in more “modern” times, angels have made themselves known to the people of God. John Patton, the Scottish missionary to the Hebrides Islands in the South Pacific in 1858, experienced an unusual deliverance by angels. He and his wife were surrounded by a group of headhunters but as the Pattons prayed, the headhunters fled. Later the chieftain of the group described to Patton that they had seen a group of men in shining white clothes with drawn swords surrounding their hut; so they left without doing any harm.

In 1922, Edwin and Carol Carlson, missionaries to West China, related a story about their experience when a professional brigand, that is a member of a robber band that worked the area, came one night expecting to attack the mission station. “They were on their way down a side street and as they drew near to the walls of the mission compound, the men were terrorized by the sight of men in white walking up and down the wall. Of course they could go no farther.” I could go on and on with stories that would be nothing short of amazing as they revealed the awesome power and purpose of angels. And while we might find ourselves thrilled by such angelic feats, the point this morning is that angels are all diminished when compared to our Lord Jesus Christ and what He has accomplished for the redeemed.

But our fascination with angels also pales in comparison to what the first century world of the Hebrews considered about angels. Some of what they believed was true and Scriptural. To the Jews, angels were the highest of all God’s heavenly creatures. Their home is heaven (Matthew 24:26); they are said to be “mighty in strength (Psalm 103:20); they are God’s ministers or servants (Psalm 104:4). Like a gentleman-in-waiting, angels “attend” to the Ancient of Days (Daniel 7:10). Angels are holy (Matthew 25:31) and their countenances are

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

like lightening and their garments are white as snow (Matthew 28:3). Angels, according to Scripture and Jewish thought were the mediators of the Old Covenant. Both Acts 7:51-53 and Galatians 3:19 tell us that the law was received by the ordination of angels. As a result of these things, the Jews not only highly esteemed angels, but also regarded angles as better and higher than man. So, as we come to answer the question in a moment as to why did the author of Hebrews introduce the concept of angels in Hebrews 1:4 and carry the idea all the way through to the end of the chapter, we must remember that Jesus, the Son, was seen in the flesh as a man, perhaps in the minds of many of these readers, a mere man, who although He may have outshined the Old Testament prophets, could not be compared to the greatness and awesomeness of angels.

Before we go on, let me also share with you then some of the myths and false ideas that many of the Jews of the day had concerning angels. Many believed that the angels of heaven acted like a royal senate or council for God and that God did nothing without first consulting them. Some believed that many of the angels actually objected to God's creating man and giving man God's law and that some of these angels attacked Moses as he made his way up Mount Sinai to receive the Law. At the time of the writing of the letter to the Hebrews, many Jews believed that there were two hundred that controlled the movement of the stars and that there was one angel in particular that was responsible for the calendar and the passing of time. There was supposedly an angel of the sea, of the frost, of the dew, rain, hail, snow, thunder and lightening. Some angels were the wardens of hell and the torturers of the damned. Needless to say, just like many today, there was a preoccupation with angels, so much so that God and His work was sometimes forgotten and angels, rather than the Lord, was exalted in the sight of men. In fact, the Apostle Paul even had to warn the church of Colosse and it's surrounding vicinities saying, *"Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels..."*(2:18).

And consider this well, at the time of this letter, some Jews even made appeals to angels (that is prayed to them) asking them to direct their prayers to God and to secure divine favor. The temptation facing these Hebrews then was of moving from a dependence upon Jesus Christ alone as their mediator of the New Covenant in favor of appealing to angels. Some were tempted to diminish Jesus in their understanding to being nothing more than an angel while others were tempted to see Jesus as a mere man and subsequently and continually lower than the angels. So now, beginning with verse 4, the author sets forth a

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

striking contrast between angels and Jesus Christ, to demonstrate that He is greater than the angels, and therefore worthy of obedient trust.

All this talk about how angels compare to Jesus Christ begs a question however. We have seen how some of these first readers might be tempted to regard Jesus as nothing more than an angel or even consider Jesus somehow less than the angels. But what application does this have to a 21st century evangelical Christian who already believes in the superiority of Christ over angels? I submit to you that we must be careful not to diminish and disregard the Scriptures teaching on the significance and ministry of angels. Perhaps our temptation is not to overly regard the ministry and role of angels, but rather the opposite, we might regard them very little. However, some can also easily and sometimes unknowingly slipped into a pattern of looking to angels or other beings to mediate between God and us. One of the lessons we must come to learn from this passage is *that our faith is to rest solely upon the greatness of Jesus Christ alone as the only mediator between God and ourselves*. No angel, no person, no other thing is to come between you and your relationship to God. Are you resting in the great sufficiency for salvation that is in Jesus Christ alone?

In Hebrews 1:4, the author then begins this contrast between Jesus Christ and the angels. He sets up this contrast by appealing to seven Old Testament passages that reveal Jesus as being greater than any and all the angels. It is important to note that the author of Hebrews considers his audience well versed in the Old Testament. Rather than appeal to them with some New Testament thought or idea, our author turns them back to the very Scriptures they would see as authoritative. It is as if the author is saying, “Judge for yourselves whether what I say be true – look at what the Sacred Writings say concerning the Messiah and angels.” So then, from these seven Old Testament passages, we will see four areas, the first of which we will look at this morning, in which the Son is Superior to the Angels and the use of seven Old Testament passages to prove the point.

I. The Son is Superior over the Angels by Rank (1:4-5)

Let us remember what we have already learned about the Son from the opening verses. First the author has presented the Son as the means by which God has finally and forever spoken to mankind. We then learned that the Son radiates God’s glory, manifests the divine nature, and sustains every particle and atom in the universe by the exercise of His own powerful word. He Himself accomplished the work of redemption and then took His seat as the authority over all creation. With all this, who would dare claim that anyone or anything

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

might be superior to the Son? Yet, it appears that some of the Hebrews addressed in this letter had fallen prey to so consider angels. As noted, some even thought that it was only through or by angels that one might rightly pray to and seek the favor of God. So, some thought of Jesus as less than the angels, while others thought of Him as only being perhaps equal to angels.

So now the author of Hebrews comes to set the record straight. Just like people today, the first readers need to clearly know who Jesus is as the supreme and exalted one over all creation. After stating then in verse three that the Son, **“sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high”** we are then told this in verse 4, **“having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.”**

So here we come to learn that the Son is higher in **rank** than the angels because of His name. In Jewish thought, **“name”** reveals the true nature of a person. To a Jew, “the name is the outward expression and the pledge and seal of all that a person really and substantially is.”¹ In other words, the name of a person in Jewish thought conveys all who that person is. So, when we pray in Jesus’ name we are supposed to be well aware that we come to the throne of grace by the merits, nature, and will of Jesus Christ. The reason why the *name* of Jesus Christ excels the *name* of angels, is that no angel possesses the nature nor has done the work of Jesus as Savior and Redeemer. Therefore, by being told that the Son has inherited a more excellent name than the angels, we are being told that the Son is better than the angels in His character, better in His abilities and better in His work on behalf of men. All of the work of the angelic hosts combined cannot compare to the work of Jesus Christ. But specifically how is the name of Jesus “more excellent” than that of the angels? Let us consider two things.

First, in verse 4, the name of Jesus is more excellent than that of the angels by **deed**. Notice in our text that the Son is said to **“having become as much better than the angels as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.”** Remember that one of the overriding themes of the book of Hebrews is how much better Christ is over all persons and things. This idea of “better” is used no less than 13 times in the letter as we will learn that Christ is “much better” than the Old Testament priesthood, “much better” than Moses and Joshua; “much better” than the Old Testament sacrifices and tabernacle; and as we see here, Christ is “much better” than the angels.

¹ Pink, A.W. – *An Exposition of Hebrews*, p. 48

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

There are two ways in verse 4 by which we learn that by His deeds, Christ has a more excellent name than the angels. First, notice the opening words of verse 4 saying that the Son is He who, **“having become as much better....”** This tells us something about His work. Now we need to settle something as we speak of the work of Christ and of Him **“having become as much better...”** In verses 1-3 we have already seen the essence or nature of the Son, namely that He Himself is and always has been God, the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of God’s nature. Jesus has always been and always will be God as John 1:1 testifies. But Jesus has not always been “in the flesh” or the incarnate God. What the author of Hebrews is doing here is in effect saying, “If you think that somehow Christ becoming flesh has diminished Him, think again.” For it is His work as the incarnate God that has insured that man might see Christ as better than the angels. The verb here of **“having become”** speaks of a process, the process of Jesus being born, living a perfect and righteous life and then of dying for the sins of His people on the cross only to be raised again triumphantly in power by the resurrection. It is this process by which men may come to recognize that Jesus is the one who has become as much better than the angels.

So then, because of this willful obedience, the Son not only becomes or is revealed as better than the angels, but our text secondly tells us that He also then **“has inherited a more excellent name than they.”** Again, because of the deeds or work of Christ as Redeemer, Jesus’ name and person is to be seen as more excellent than any other name. It is interesting to note that the author of Hebrews literally writes here that the Son “inherited and will always continue to inherit a more excellent name than they.” There will never be a time in the future in which someone or some angel might say they deserve a higher rank than that of Jesus. In fact, the obedience of Jesus while on this earth has forever secured the position of the Son of God as absolutely worthy of all worship and praise. The apostle Paul would put it this way in Philippians 2:8-11;

8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

† The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

The apostle John also reveals to us the worth and worship of the Son as a result of His obedience in Revelation 5:9 where we read:

Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation

Again, the deeds or work of Christ is what must be considered as causing the name of Jesus to being a more excellent name than any angel. What Jesus Christ has done declares that His name is greater than the angels.

2. By declaration

But the name of Jesus is not simply much better and more excellent by virtue of what Christ has done but also by virtue of God's divine declaration. To be sure, we tend to determine the value or worth of something by what it is able to do or accomplish for us. A car is valuable only because it is able to get us to where we want to go, but any car that does not work, we would generally consider worthless. But with Christ we must be careful not simply to consider Him worthy and valuable by virtue of what He has done, but also because God simply says so. In verse 5 we have this divine declaration added to the work of Christ: ***“For to which of the angels did he every say, ‘YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU’? And again, ‘I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME’?”*** Here we have the first of our Old Testament passages used by the author to prove the superiority of Christ over the angels.

The first quotation comes from Psalm 2, which is what we call a Messianic psalm, Messianic because it speaks of the Messiah, which is the Hebrew work for Christ. So then, this Psalm speaks to us of Jesus Christ. In Psalm 2:7, God the Father is speaking in the context of this King's rule over the nations and says these words, ***“YOU ARE MY SON...”*** Now these are not words that any angel was accustomed to hearing. To be sure, angels are sometimes referred to as “sons of God” as in the book of Job, but never, in all of Scripture, is any one angel ever referred to individually as ***“Son.”*** Only Jesus is given this title of ***“Son”*** as is seen during His early ministry at His baptism, where in Matthew 3:17 is recorded the words of the Father, ***“This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”*** And at His transfiguration where again in Matthew 17:5 where the Father says, ***“This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him.”***

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

What is of particular interest to me is the way this phrase actually reads in the Greek which clearly points to the importance of this statement. The Greek actually reads in this order, “*Son of mine, You are!*” The relationship that exists between the Father and Son here is absolutely unique. For while the angels have been referred to collectively as the “sons of God” and even the redeemed are given the title “sons of God” in Matthew 5:9 and Romans 8:14, 19 and Galatians 3:26, these relationships are not like that which has always existed and will continue to exist between the First and Second Person’s of the Trinity. Jesus is and always will be the one unique and only begotten Son of God.

Now the word “***begotten***” has been misused and abused by many, particularly of the cults, to try to diminish the superiority of Christ. “***Begotten***” does not mean that Jesus did not previously exist. Rather it “is the begetting of or bringing in the *incarnate* Son into the world. In addition, the Scriptures make it clear that this being “begotten” which means “being delivered of” marks the completion and the acceptance of His redeeming mission to our world by His resurrection.” When we read the phrase, “***today I have begotten You***” it does not speak of Jesus coming into existence as God, but coming into this world at His birth, fulfilling the mission of God as Redeemer, and being proved as this Redeemer Son by being raised from the dead. Look with me at Acts 13:32-33. Here we read from Paul’s sermon this –

32 And we preach to you the good news of the promise made to the fathers, 33 that God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'YOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU.'

Here we see that Psalm 2:7 and Jesus being equated to as Son is because of the resurrection. Because Jesus did in fact rise from the dead, He has shown Himself to be the one true and unique Son. This is the testimony of Paul in Romans 1:4 which says,

who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead,

Jesus is the Son not only because He was born of a Virgin into humanity, being made for a time “***a little lower than the angels***” (Hebrews 2:9), but also because He was begotten again from the dead. So then, no angel has gone through the process of Redeeming man like Jesus and no angel is individually

The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

called Son and no angel was proved to be the Son by being raised from the dead.

Now our author continues to push this idea of the Son having a higher rank than the angels by virtue of His title by quoting a second Old Testament passage from 2 Samuel 7:14 which is part of the Davidic Covenant, or the promise God made to David concerning his posterity. Here the special and unique relationship of God to be the Father to one of David's Sons was prophesied of by the prophet Nathan to King David as God made this promise to David's Son: **"I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME."** Now the immediate fulfillment of this promise was directed toward Solomon, but as is the case with many of the prophecies of Scripture there is both a near and far fulfillment. Solomon was a type or picture of Christ, but Solomon's kingdom was not eternal and his reign did not last forever as was also prophesied in verse 16, having been marred by Solomon's own sinfulness. Now, the author of Hebrews comes and reveals how Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of this promise being the perfect and blameless Son of God. We are being told that only Jesus was sufficient in character and nature to exist in eternal Sonship with the Father. And only Christ, not an angel, received this promise from the Father.

So, we learn this morning that this name of Jesus as the Son places Him in higher rank over any and all angels. But now we must seek to make some application to those of us who perhaps already believe without question of Christ's superiority over angels. Remember that what was at issue for many of these first readers of the letter was that perhaps somehow Jesus, as wonderful and powerful as He was, was not sufficient to trust for prayers or that there was still something or someone out there that is greater and better than Jesus. When we look at the problem this way, many applications begin to come to mind. For while we may not find ourselves tempted to look to angels as being able to provide some better or closer relationship to God, we all do have tendencies and temptations to look to other persons or things to bring us satisfaction in life. I know that some of you struggle with Jesus being first and being your all in all. Some struggle with the wealth and cares of this world and so Jesus becomes second or third behind personal gain. My friends, the snares of materialism and person self-gratification is just as heinous of a temptation and sin as of considering an angel as being equally or more important than Jesus. Some of you struggle in relationships, seeking meaning and satisfaction first in another person rather than first in Christ. The author of Hebrews would say to us, *"Who can bring you more peace and contentment than the Son of God who has come to be everything to you?"* It is an easy trap to fall into and I would ask you to

† The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ

...God has spoken to us in His Son...(Hebrews 1:2)

carefully consider this morning what people or things might be taking the place of first importance in your life. For we must not be trusting in anything or anyone less than Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as Redeemer, as Mediator and as Sustainer? He has a name greater than the angels, which means He has abilities and resources that far exceed any angel or any other created thing.

*Jesus, My God! I know His name, His name is all my trust
Nor will He put my soul to shame, nor let my hope be lost.*

Isaac Watts, 1709

Soli Deo Gloria

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**The Book of Hebrews – The Superiority of Christ
Hebrews 1:4-14 – Christ's Superiority Over the Angels
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