

Jesus Christ, Superior to Angels, Part 1

Scripture: Hebrews 1:4–6

Code: 1602

INTRODUCTION

The book of Hebrews is written primarily to Jewish believers, but also to Jewish unbelievers. The writer wants to convince both groups that the New Covenant is better than the old one—that Jesus Christ is the better priest and better mediator, and that He is the final priest and final sacrifice. Throughout Hebrews the writer presents comparisons between the New and Old Covenants and between Jesus Christ and everyone else to show that He is superior. We have already seen that in the first three verses of Hebrews. Then beginning in verses 4-14 the Holy Spirit teaches us that Jesus Christ is superior to angels.

A. The Biblical View of Angels

Man is a wonderful creation, higher than plants, animals, and any other material creation in this world. But there are created beings even higher than man—angels. Hebrews 2:9 indicates that angels are higher than humans because it says that when Jesus became a man, He "was made a little lower than the angels." After the fall of the rebellious angels under Lucifer, the angels in heaven were no longer subject to sin. These angels are holy, powerful, and wise. They do not suffer the same infirmities as men. They are special beings created by God before He created men. They were in the heavens observing when God created the world. They were made higher than men, at least higher than fallen men.

1. Their appearance

Angels are spirit beings, yet they have some kind of form. They are even capable of appearing in a human form. Hebrews 13:2 says, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers; for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." They can also appear in other forms. For example, Matthew 28:3-4 describes an angel who appeared at the scene of Christ's resurrection, sitting on the stone that had been rolled away: "His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow; and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men." This angel appeared in a dazzling, brilliant glory. So when we say that angels are spirits, we do not necessarily mean they have no form. They have a form that can manifest itself as human or in another way.

2. Their creation

All the angels were created simultaneously (Col. 1:16-17). They are unable to procreate (Matt. 22:28-30). God made them all with unique identities. Each angel is a direct creation of God standing in an immediate personal relationship to the Creator who made him.

The Old Testament assumes the existence of angels. There are 108 references in the Old

Testament to angels and 165 in the New Testament. There's no doubt that angels exist and that the Old Testament saints were well aware of it.

3. Their attributes

a) Intelligence

Angels render intelligent worship and service to God. That's why they were created--to render service to God of a special nature.

b) Emotion

The Bible says that angels rejoice when sinners are saved (Luke 15:10).

c) Speech

Angels can speak. In Galatians 1:8 the apostle Paul says, "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you ..."

d) Swiftiness

According to Daniel 9:21 angels have incredible speed. Sometimes they are pictured with as many as six wings.

4. Their home

According to Mark 13:32 and Jude 6, the unfallen angels have a special abode in heaven. God lives in the third heaven (Deut. 10:14; cf. 2 Cor. 12:2). The second heaven is the universe. The first heaven is the atmosphere of the earth. Are there beings in other parts of the universe? Yes, but they are not beings from other planets; they are angelic beings who inhabit the universe.

5. Their number

The number of angels has not changed since they were originally created, although a great number of them have fallen. So they are not subject to death. Nowhere does Scripture indicate that they can die or be made extinct. They do not decrease or increase. Angels are countless ages older than men, and evidently trillions of them exist. Even after numberless hosts of them fell with Satan, there still remain many holy angels. For example, in Daniel 7:10, Daniel said, "A thousand thousands ministered unto him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him." Revelation 5:11 says, "The number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." Now that's a lot of angels! And there are exactly enough to get all the work done.

6. Their power

Angels are more powerful than men, and men must call on divine power to deal with them, especially the fallen ones. Ephesians 6:10-11 says, "Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.... For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against [fallen angels]."

7. Their organization

Angels are highly organized. The various ranks are referred to as thrones, dominions, principalities, powers, and authorities (Eph. 6:12; Col. 1:16). Some of the special classes of angels are cherubim, seraphim, and those described as living creatures. Some have names: Lucifer, Michael, and Gabriel. Lucifer is the name Satan had before he fell. Michael is the head of the armies of heaven.

8. Their ministry

Angels are seen in Scripture as spectators at all redemptive events. They minister to God and do His bidding. For example, they ministered to Christ in His humiliation. At the conclusion of His temptation, the Bible says that angels came and ministered to Him (Matt. 4:11). They also minister to the saved by watching over the church and the preacher. They assist God in answering prayer, delivering the saints from danger, encouraging them, and protecting children. In addition, they minister to the unsaved by announcing judgment and carrying it out.

B. The Jewish View of Angels

The Jewish people at the time Hebrews was written had a different view of angels. Many of their views had begun to wander from the basic Old Testament context because of Talmudic writings and Rabbinical ideas. The writer of Hebrews had to write this epistle not only with the true biblical view of angels in mind, but also with the exalted Jewish concept of angels as a problem to overcome.

1. Mediated between God and man

The Jews believed that angels were very important to the old covenant. They had always esteemed angels as the highest beings next to God. They believed angels were the mediators between men and God. For example, they thought that angels surrounded God. They believed angels were the instruments who brought God's Word and worked God's will in the universe and among men. They were thought of as ethereal creatures made of a fiery substance like blazing light--and that analysis may not be far from wrong. They believed that angels were created, that they did not eat or drink, and that they did not procreate.

2. Acted as God's senate

The Jews also believed that angels were God's senate and that God never did anything without first asking the angels. When Genesis 1:26 says, "Let us make man in our image," they believe God was speaking of His angelic senate in the word "us." Some believed that angels objected to the creation of men and were annihilated for their objection. Others believed angels objected to the giving of the law and attacked Moses on his way up Mount Sinai.

3. Were assigned special tasks

Angels were given names by the Jews. They believed there was a group of "presence angels" who stayed in the presence of God at all times. They were given names such as Raphael, Yurriel, Phanuel, Gabriel, and Michael. El was one name for God that was added on at the end of every name. It was believed that there were two hundred angels who controlled the movements of the stars and kept things on course. They believed there was a calendar angel who controlled the neverending succession of days, months, and years. They believed that there was one mighty angel who took care of the seas, one who took care of frost, one for dew, rain, snow, hail, thunder, lightning, and so on. There were also thought to be angels who were the wardens of hell and the torturers of the damned. They believed that recording angels wrote down every word that every man spoke. They also believed there was an angel of death. And they believed that there was a guardian angel for every nation and every child. There were so many angels that one rabbi said every blade of grass has its angel.

I've given you a backdrop of angels both from the viewpoint of Scripture and from the Jewish people. But one more thing needs to be noted because it has particular significance to the section of

Hebrews written in reference to angels.

4. Gave the Old Testament to Israel

The Jews knew that the Old Covenant and Old Testament were brought to them from God by angels. That belief above any other exalted the angels in the minds of the children of Israel. They believed that angels were the mediators of their covenant with God, and that they continued that ministry all the time.

a) The proof

(1) Acts 7:51-53--The following is an excerpt from Stephen's indictment of Israel: "Ye stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them who showed before of the coming of the Just One, of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers; who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it."

(2) Galatians 3:19--"Wherefore, then, serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator."

The Old Covenant was brought to men and maintained by angelic mediation. The angels ministered between God and men to carry on the work of the Old Covenant. The Jews knew that and consequently had the highest regard for angels.

b) The perversion

Some Jews exalted angels to such a degree that they actually began to worship them. This activity developed into a heresy known as Gnosticism, which reduced Jesus Christ to an angel. The Colossian church had been flirting with Gnosticism when Paul wrote, "Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels" (Col. 2:18).

Angels were supremely exalted in the Jewish mind. So if the writer of Hebrews is to present to the Hebrews that Christ is the mediator of a better covenant, then he will have to show that Christ is better than angels. That becomes his purpose in Hebrews 1:4-14. He shows that Christ, the bearer of the New Covenant is a better mediator than the mediators of the Old Covenant, who were angels. Therefore, Christ must be better than angels. The writer sets out to prove that by using seven Old Testament passages to verify it.

The First Translation

If you were to compare the quotations of the seven Old Testament passages in Hebrews 1:4-14 with the same passages in the Old Testament, you would find that they are not quoted exactly--there is slight variation. The reason is this: By the time the epistle of Hebrews was written, there existed a book called the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew text. Near the time of Christ existed such a tremendous number of Greek-speaking Jews, that seventy scholars translated the Hebrew text into Greek. Evidently, the writer of Hebrews was influenced by Greek culture because when he quoted the Old Testament, he invariably used the Septuagint as his source. Consequently, it varies slightly from the Hebrew translation, but not in truth or in fact. Where there is some difference, it is not a difference in meaning, only in a phrase or in word choice. One of the reasons we don't believe Paul was the writer of Hebrews is that he usually quoted the Old Testament from the Hebrew text.

Effective Jewish Evangelism

The writer of Hebrews uses the Old Testament wisely and deftly to show the Jews that Christ is a better mediator, and that's what makes the argument powerful. Were we to try to use the New Testament to prove to Israel that Christ is a better mediator, they would say, "We don't accept the New Testament." So the writer says, "Let me prove it to you from your own Scriptures." We will see the tremendous power that is in this kind of argument.

The text for this lesson is the first part of Hebrews 1:4, "Being made so much better than the angels." That's the proposition the writer seeks to prove. Who is better than the angels? Jesus Christ, who is the subject of verses 1-3. From verse 4-14 the writer goes on to prove that Christ is better than angels.

In What Sense Was Christ Made Better Than the Angels?

Many cults and unorthodox religious organizations deny the deity of Christ on the basis of Hebrews 1:4. They claim that Christ was not God but a created being. When verse 4 says, "Being made so much better than the angels," they say, "See, Christ was made." But the Greek word used there for "made" is not *poieo*, which means, "to make" or "create"; it is *ginomai*, which means, "to become." Jesus Christ has always existed, but He became better than the angels in His exaltation, inferring at one time that He had been lower than the angels (Heb. 2:9). Specifically, in Hebrews 1:4 the writer is referring to Christ as God's Son. Christ as a man became lower than angels. But as a result of His faithful obedience and the wonderful work He accomplished as a Son, He was exalted above the angels, which is where He had been before. For a while He was lower than the angels, faithfully accomplishing God's work; He became better than the angels as the exalted Son.

LESSON

In what ways was Jesus better than the angels? Five ways: His title, His worship, His nature, His eternity, and His destiny.

I. HIS TITLE (vv. 4-5)

"Being made [becoming] so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he [God] at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?"

A. The Establishment of Sonship

The Holy Spirit says that Jesus is better than angels because He has a better name. To what angel did God ever say, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?" To what angel did God ever say, "I will be a Father to You, and You will be a Son to Me?" The answer is, none. The angels are ministers and messengers, but Christ was the Son. That's a great difference. So Christ obtained a more excellent name than angels.

In our culture the names we pick for our children don't have much connection with the child's character. Many do pick up nicknames that have something to do with a particular characteristic. In the Bible, God chose specific names that had to do with some aspect of individuals' lives. Frequently, the name spoke of an inward reality. Jesus Christ was given a name that is above every name (Phil. 2:9), including angels.

B. The Prophecies of Sonship

The writer quotes two Old Testament passages to show that Jesus has a better name than angels. Hebrews 1:5 quotes Psalm 2:7: "Unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?" Then again in verse 5 he says, "I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son." That's a quote from 2 Samuel 7:14, where David had been given a prophecy that he would have a great son. Which angel has ever been called a Son? None. As Christians, we are collectively called "sons of God" or "children of God"; the angels are likewise in the sense that God created them. But no one angel is ever called the "Son of God." Neither has God said to an angel, "This day have I begotten thee." God says, "I have a Son who has a greater name." The Old Testament predicted that a Son was going to come. Psalm 2:7 says, "Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." Second Samuel 7:14 also predicts the coming of the Son: "I will be his father, and he shall be my son."

C. The Time of Sonship

God as Father and Jesus as the Son demonstrates the unique relationship between the first and second Persons of the Trinity. The word "today" indicates that God's Son was born in a point of time. He was always God, but He fulfilled His role as Son in space and time at His incarnation and was affirmed as such by His resurrection.

D. The Fullness of Sonship

There are two basic areas in which God demonstrated the Sonship of Jesus Christ.

1. His virgin birth

a) Luke 1:35--"The angel answered, and said unto her [Mary], The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee; therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Christ was not called the Son of God until He was born. Verse 32 says, "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest."

b) Luke 3:22--At Christ's baptism "the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son." After Christ's incarnation, God said, "This is My Son!" Prior to that, God never referred to the second member of the Trinity in that way.

Since the phrase "this day" in Hebrews 1:5 could not refer to eternal Sonship, it must refer to a point in time. Luke 2:11 uses the phrase "For unto you is born this day." The Son was born at a point in time. Christ's Sonship began with His virgin birth. Prior to that He was eternal God in the Godhead with the other members of the Trinity.

2. His resurrection

Jesus' Sonship came to full bloom in His resurrection. We see His Sonship not only because He was begotten of a virgin, but also because He was begotten again from the dead.

a) Romans 1:3-4--"Concerning His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead." Christ was made a Son in birth, and He was declared to be a Son in resurrection.

b) Acts 13:33--This verse also quotes Psalm 2:7, as does Hebrews 1:5: "God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee." That tells us conclusively that Psalm 2:7 is related to the resurrection.

Jesus is a Son in resurrection. In the Old Testament it was prophesied that He would come as a Son. In the New Testament He came as a Son in His virgin birth and was declared to be the Son by His resurrection from the dead.

Angels are the most excellent of all creatures, but if Christ has a more excellent name than they, He must have the most excellent name. So the writer of Hebrews tells his readers from their own Scriptures that Jesus Christ is greater than angels because He obtained a greater name.

II. HIS WORSHIP (v. 6)

"And again, when he bringeth in the first-begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him."

Even though Jesus Christ humbled Himself and was made lower than the angels for a time, angels are still to worship Him. If angels are to worship Him, then He must be greater than they are. Therefore His covenant is greater than the one they brought--Christianity is greater than Judaism. Hebrews 1:6 quotes Psalm 97:7. The psalmist was saying all angels were to worship the Lord's Christ. The Jews should not have been surprised at that because it came right out of their own Scripture.

Didn't the angels always worship Christ?" Yes. They worshiped Him throughout all the time of their existence prior to His incarnation, only they worshiped Him as God. But then they were called to worship Him as the Son. This Son who became a man is higher than angels because He is the very God that angels have always worshiped. Did you know it is an absolute sin and violation of all God's laws to worship anyone but God? And if God is saying that all the angels worship the Son, then the Son must be God. Christ is not only the God of eternity, but also the Son of humanity. In His incarnate Person, even as in His eternal Person, Christ is to be worshiped.

A. His Position

1. Defined

Verse 6 says that Christ is the "first-begotten." Many people use this word as their proof text that Jesus is a created being. But they don't understand that the word "first-begotten" does not have anything to do with time but position. Colossians 1:15 says Christ "is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation." They also try to use that as a proof text. They claim Colossians 1:15 proves that Christ was created. But the Greek word for "first-begotten" and "first-born" is prototokos, which means "the chief one." Christ was not begotten; He is the chief, the sovereign of everything. That term was connected with the concept of the first-born because the eldest son was usually the heir to everything--the chief of the father's estate. Prototokos then came to mean, "one with all the dignity and honor who stood as the chief one." Jesus Christ is the prototokos. And that refers to His right and authority, not to His time of birth.

There were two brothers in the Old Testament named Jacob and Esau. Now Esau was the oldest, but Jacob was the prototokos. Genesis 49:3 describes the character of Jacob's prototokos: "Reuben, thou art my first-born, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellence of dignity, and the excellency of power." What does prototokos mean? Might, strength, dignity, and power. So it is not a word of time; it is a word of authority. Jesus Christ is the prototokos in the sense that He has the right to rule.

2. Dignified

Colossians 1:18 says Christ "is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead." That verse indicates Jesus as the firstborn from the dead. Now, had anyone been resurrected before Jesus? Yes, Lazarus, the people Jesus resurrected during His earthly life, all the Old Testament saints that were raised at the crucifixion (Matt. 26:52, and all others that were raised from the dead before Jesus. Yet Colossians 1:18 says He was the firstborn from the dead. That means Christ was the chief one of all who had ever been raised. The word "first-born" can't refer to time or else the verse would be a lie. Prototokos means that Christ is the main one, the most honored one, the most dignified one, the highest one, and the most powerful one. Of all those who were resurrected, Jesus is the greatest. The title refers to Christ's glory and dignity, not to the concept of being created before anything else was created.

B. His Return

The existence of the word "again" in Hebrews 1:6 has caused commentators, including myself, many problems: "And again, when He bringeth in the [prototokos] into the world, He saith, And let all the angels of God worship Him" (emphasis added).

1. The destination of Christ

Before we can understand the word "again" here, we need to define what is meant by the word "world." The common Greek word for world (kosmos), which refers to the whole universe, is not used here. The Greek word that is used is oikoumene, which means, "the inhabited earth." Christ was not the first to be born on earth, yet He is the first-born--the chief one, the dignified one--who came to an already inhabited earth.

2. The day of return

We need to look at verse 6 in the order of the Greek text: "And when again He brings in the

[prototokos] into the world" (emphasis added). When is the "again" going to take place? At the second coming. God already brought Christ into the world once as Son, and He's going to bring Him again in the future in blazing glory.

3. The desire of the angels

It is at the second coming that the fullness of the prophecy in verse 6 comes to pass: "Let all the angels of God worship Him." At present, the angels don't fully understand the whole picture of God's redemptive plan. First Peter 1:11-12 presents the picture of the Old Testament prophets, who wrote down what God told them and then read what they wrote to determine what it meant. They were inspired by the Holy Spirit but in many cases didn't understand it, "searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them did signify, when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed that, not unto themselves but unto us they did minister the things which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven." The things the prophets couldn't understand were not to be understood until Christ came, the gospel was preached, and the Spirit was made manifest. Verse 12 continues, "Which things the angels desire to look into." Even the angels don't understand all God's revelation as yet. Perhaps the "presence angels" around God's throne understand, but the vast angelic hosts are evidently not yet able to discern everything. They are not omniscient. It is not until God brings the prototokos into the world that the angels will be able to give full and complete worship.

4. The delight of worship

I believe that the angels around the throne worship God now, and I also believe that there might be angels who worship the Son, but if I read my Bible right, the angels are still trying to figure out things they don't understand. But once the time comes for Jesus to return, how are the angels going to react? In Revelation 5:11-12 the apostle John says, "I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the living creatures and the elders, and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." That is what angelic worship will be like when Christ comes again to take the earth.

In Revelation 5:1, the Father is pictured holding the title deed to the earth, a scroll, and an angel says, "Who is worth to open the scroll, and to loose its seals?" (v. 2). The apostle John begins crying in verse 4 because no one was found to open the scroll. But in verse 5 one of the elders says, "Weep not; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the scroll, and to loose its seven seals." Jesus Christ, the Lamb, takes the scroll. As He is about to unroll the judgments and take possession of the earth, the angels say, "Oh, it's all clear now!" Praises burst forth from millions of angels in heaven. Verses 13-14 says, "Every creature that is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb forever and ever. And the four living creatures said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshiped him that liveth forever and ever."

It is at the second coming that Christ is revealed in His full glory as the Son--the prototokos. Even the angels will understand it all when they see Him return as King of kings and Lord of lords. Christ is greater than angels because God commands angels to worship Him. And if God commanded the angels to worship His Son, then His Son must be God.

Focusing on the Facts

1. How do we know that angels are higher created beings than humans?
2. What kind of form can angels take?
3. Describe some of the attributes of angels.
4. Describe the ministry of angels.
5. What did the Jewish people believe to be true about angels? Explain.
6. What belief, above any other belief, exalted the angels in the minds of the Jewish people?
7. What heresy developed as the result of Jews who began to worship angels?
8. What did the writer of Hebrews use to prove the superiority of Christ over angels?
9. Why are quotations from the Old Testament in Hebrews 1:4-14 different from the original passages in the Old Testament?
10. Explain how Christ was made lower than angels.
11. What does the title "Son of God" refer to about Jesus Christ? Explain.
12. Why is it incorrect to say that Jesus Christ is inferior to God because He is called Son?
13. What are the two areas of Christ's life in which He is manifest as the Son?
14. What does the word "first-begotten" in Hebrews 1:6 refer to? What is the significance of that?
15. Explain what Colossians 1:18 means.
16. What does the word "again" in Hebrews 1:6 refer to?
17. What does 1 Peter 1:12 indicate about the angels' understanding of God's redemptive plan?
18. How will the angels react when Jesus returns (Rev. 5:11-14)?

Pondering the Principles

1. The writer of Hebrews used seven Old Testament passages to verify Christ's superiority over angels. That is just a sampling of the many times that the writers of the New Testament used the Old Testament to verify God's timeless truths. As an exercise, match the following New Testament passages to the Old Testament passage it quotes:

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| a. Galatians 3:8 1. | a. Deuteronomy 8:3 |
| b. Hebrews 8:5 2. | b. Psalm 14:1-3 |
| c. Romans 9:15 3. | c. Genesis 12:3 |
| d. Matthew 5:43 4. | d. Isaiah 40:13 |
| e. Matthew 4:4 5. | e. Exodus 25:40 |
| f. Hebrews 13:5 6. | f. Leviticus 19:18 |
| g. Romans 11:34 7. | g. Exodus 33:19 |
| h. Romans 3:10-12 8. | h. Deuteronomy 31:6, 8 |

What truth does each of those passages verify? Thank God for the consistency of His Word. His truths are timeless. As you study the Bible, be aware of the many Old Testament passages that the New Testament writers use to verify God's truths. Use them to share the truth of Christ with Jewish people who do not know that Jesus is the Savior of their own Scriptures.

2. Look up the following verses: Matthew 16:16-17, 28:18-19; John 1:3-4, 5:25-27, 10:30; Philippians 2:10; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 13:8; Revelation 19:16. What does each of those verses have to say about the deity of Christ? When people bring Christ's deity into question, you need to be able to show them He is God, just as the writer of Hebrews did. To better prepare yourself, do additional study into the deity of Christ. You might find a theology book on the doctrine of Christ to be helpful.

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