

“Jesus Is Greater Than the Angels”

Heb. 1:4-14

- INTRO. - We’re going to be talking about angels this morning, and we know that there has always been an interest in these mysterious creatures. I remember when the Frank Perretti series came out and how nearly everyone was reading his books about angels.

- Angels have always appeared as beloved characters on television and in movies. Whether it’s Clarence Oddbody from “It’s a Wonderful Life” or Michael Landon in “Highway to Heaven” or “Touched by an Angel,” we all have our favorite angel characters. There are even “Angels in the Outfield.”

- One author wrote, “Whether as cheeky cherubs or ethereal assistants, they’re flexible and diligent, always willing to help. And we can’t seem to get enough of them.” Many famous faces have donned fluffy wings, black trench coats, or flannel shirts to be God’s messengers.

- The problem (though) with most modern portrayals of angels is that they are based on New Age ideas instead of the Bible. Dubious metaphysical and psychological experiences are presented in lieu of what is revealed in Scripture.

- And as one author so correctly put it, “Many see any spiritual experience, regardless of its nature or message,

as communicating truth, and even some professing to be followers of Christ are buying into the broader culture’s infatuation with angels.”

- But the Bible warns us (in 1 John 4:1) that we are not to believe every spirit, but we are to test the spirits and see if they are from God. We need to be very careful – because, as Paul reminds us in 2 Cor. 11:14 – even Satan himself often masquerades as an angel of light.

- As Christians, we need to know what the Bible teaches about angels, and we need to stay within the confines of that divine revelation. We must guard against speculations that are *not* based on biblical truth.

- Because angels are supernatural, metaphysical beings, they are shrouded in mystery. That is one of the main reasons why they are so popular in Hollywood. They make great characters because you can pretty much make them anything you choose.

-And even the Jews in the days in which the Book of Hebrews was written had embellished their understanding of angels. There was a lot of false tradition surrounding these heavenly creatures.

- For example, there was the belief (in some rabbinic schools) that God creates a new company of angels every single day, who utter a song to him and then are gone. One rabbi wrote, “The angels are renewed every morning and after they have praised God, they return to the stream

of fire from whence they came.” Another rabbi wrote that there are as many angels as blades of grass.

- Many Jews believed that the angels comprised a (sort of) heavenly council – a divine Senate or House of Representatives – and that God did nothing without consulting with them.

- In fact, they interpreted Gen. 1:26 in light of this belief. They believed that when God said, “Let us make man in our image,” this was referring to God and the angelic council.

- *Some* Jews even believed that there were *some* angels who objected to God creating men, and that they were immediately annihilated. There were some who believed that there were angels who objected to God giving the Law, and that they attacked Moses on the way up Mount Sinai.

- They had made up all kinds of ideas about angels – and even came up with a host of names as part of their traditions – but none of this was based in Scripture. So the author of Hebrews had to deal with these misconceptions about angels, along with making his point about the superiority of Christ.

- One of the most common false assumptions (both in those days and still in ours) is that there is a “guardian angel” for every person – and yet the Bible *nowhere* teaches that.

- But there was one primary assumption the Jews made, that is very relevant to Hebrews 1 – and that is their belief that the angels were the mediators of the old covenant. This (more than anything else) exalted the angels in the minds of the Jews.

- By the way, this view *is* affirmed in Scripture. In Acts 7 (in Stephen’s indictment of Israel) he referred to them as, “you who received the law as ordained by angels, and *yet* did not keep it”

- Paul wrote (in Gal. 3:19), “Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made.”

- So this understanding that it was the mediation of the angels that brought in the old covenant is what led them to hold angels in such high regard. In fact, there were *some* who were even *worshipping* angels.

- That’s why Paul had to write (in Col. 2:18), “Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on *visions* he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind...”

- Added to this was the Greek influence of Gnosticism – the idea that angels were emanations (or intermediaries)

between God and men – and you have the fuel for this heresy. Some even reduced Jesus to the level of an angel.

- And (of course) that is no different from certain cults (today) who teach that Jesus was an exalted angel – or that he became a god.

- But the point is, that the author of Hebrews needed to demonstrate the superiority of Christ in order to show the superiority of the new covenant over the old. If he could convince his fellow Jews that Christ is greater than angels, he could also show that Christ had inaugurated a greater covenant.

- Now, maybe later we will come back and spend some time on biblical angelology, but for today I want to move into this text and see the argument that is given here. The author of Hebrews quotes 7 OT passages that demonstrate the superiority of the Son.

- We're going to go all the way from v. 4 down to v. 14, and we're going to see four main points (with a couple of sub-points). And (of course) we may *not* get to all of it today – we'll see...but look with me (first of all) at:

I. THE EXCELLENCE OF THE SON (vv. 4-6)

- In vv. 4-6 we see the comparison of Jesus to the angels in regard to His excellence. In v. 4 it says, “having become as much better than the angels, as He has

inherited a more excellent name than they.” In those days a name was a reflection of personhood. This simply means that Christ is greater than the angels.

- He has obtained the name that is above every name (as Paul wrote in Phil. 2). As a result, He had become “much better than the angels.” The angels are indeed glorious – but they are *not* equal with the Son. The Son is much greater.

- The angels are ministers (and messengers) of God, but only Jesus is the Son. Jesus has a more excellent name because it is a divine name.

- And (by the way) the cults are quick to take v. 4 and say, “Jesus is a created being and therefore cannot be equal with God.” This is primarily based on the KJV, which says, “being made.”

- But the Greek word that is used there is not the word for “create” – it is the word for “becoming.” Most modern translations make that distinction. The idea is *not* that Jesus is a created being, but that He become something (in His incarnation) that He was *not* before.

- He has always been the second Person of the Trinity, but He did *not* technically become the Son until His incarnation. It was in the incarnation that He became the God-man. He became fully God and fully man. And in doing so 2:9 says He was “made for a little while lower than the angels.”

- In the Bible He is only identified as the Son after His incarnation. He is eternal God, but He became the Son – and in this He was exalted above the angels.

- I like how Herschel Hobbs puts it. He wrote, “...his becoming suggests that the divine Son *became* what he had *not* been before. Prior to his incarnation he was the divine *Creator*. When he returned to heaven he did so as the *Human-Divine Creator-Redeemer*.”

- Of course, this is the “highly exalted name” of Phil. 2:9. It is a higher level of glory than that which He had before the incarnation. The “more excellent name” is the name that is above all names – the name Jesus (Jehovah is salvation). It is the title “Lord,” meaning sovereign over all.

- And it is the title “Son,” which He did not have before His incarnation. By the way, John MacArthur says that this is a very important point, because there are certain cults that will come to your door and try to tell you, “Since Jesus is the Son of God, he is obviously...inferior to God the Father. Jesus, therefore, is not God; he is less than God. He is only a son.”

- But what we have to understand is that the Bible does *not* teach that He is the “eternal Son.” The Bible teaches that He is eternal God who obtained the title of Son in His incarnation.

- Well, the author of Hebrews makes his argument on this first point (of the excellence of the Son) in two main components (one in v. 5 and the other in v. 6). First of all he emphasizes:

A. His Relationship as Son (v. 5)

- Look with me at v. 5, “For to which of the angels did He ever say, ‘Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee’? And again, ‘I will be a Father to Him and He shall be a Son to Me’?”

- Notice (first of all) that this is a rhetorical question. When he asks, “...to which of the angels did He ever say...” the obvious answer is, “NEVER to any angel.” God has *never* equated an angel to the same position as the only begotten Son. There is only one Son and that is Jesus Christ. This is *not* really a question – it is an assertion!

- And notice (secondly) that this is directly from the OT Scripture. These rhetorical questions come from Ps. 2:7 and 2 Sam. 7:14 (quoted from the Septuagint, the Greek version of the OT).

- We recently went through Psalm 2, and it is clearly a messianic psalm. The passage in 2 Sam. 7 has to do with the Davidic covenant. It is a reference to David’s greater Son, the Lord’s Messiah. The reason it is in the future tense is because it was originally written hundreds of years before the coming of Christ into the world.

- It is fulfilled in the incarnation of Christ, as the angel Gabriel declared in Luke 1:32, “He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David...” That could never be said of any angel.

- In v. 35 we read, “And the angel answered and said to her, ‘The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.’”

- It was in the virgin birth of Christ that He became known as the Son of God. And Rev. 5:5 rightly describes Jesus as the “root of David.” He was both root and offspring of David. That’s why He alone is the rightful King of Israel and of all creation. It’s why He alone will be worthy to open the title deed to the earth.

- But go back to that first quote from Ps. 2:7. Notice the word “today.” That word “today” means that this took place at a point in time and *not* in eternity past. His role as Son began in this world.

- And notice that word “begotten.” We have *forgotten* what *begotten* means. That is *not* a word we often use today. It does *not* mean “created.” It has absolutely *nothing* to do with the false notion that Jesus was a created being.

- Begotten has to do with something Jesus accomplished or became in time and space. And in fact, (according to the teaching of the NT), it is something that occurred at His *birth*, and was declared fully at His *resurrection*.

- Paul makes this clear in Rom. 1:3-4. There he says, “...concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead...”

- He *became* the Son at His birth, but He was *declared* the Son of God at His resurrection. In Acts 13:33 it says, “God has fulfilled this *promise* to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘Thou art My Son; today I have begotten Thee.’”

- He quotes the very same Psalm as the author of Hebrews and says that this was confirmed by Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. That’s exactly what Paul said. He was “was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead...”

- One important way that we *know* He is greater than the angels is because no angel ever rose from the dead. Jesus Christ is the only one who was confirmed in this way. But *not only* do we see the excellence of the Son in His *relationship* as Son, secondly we see it in:

B. His Return as Son (v. 6)

- Look with me at v. 6, “And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says, ‘And let all the angels of God worship Him.’”

- Now, I have to start with this (because my outline is based on it), the NASB has the proper Greek word order. Look this up in a Greek NT and you’ll see that.

- John MacArthur writes, “The word ‘again’ in Hebrews 1:6 has caused commentators a great deal of difficulty...[and] the word order of the King James...has added to the confusion...”

- The KJV reads, “And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world...” Other translations have something similar (including, surprisingly, the ESV). But the Greek word order is, “And when He again brings...”

- Why is that important? Because it changes the meaning dramatically. It means that this is a time when God brings His first-born into the world again. In other words, this is referring to the Second Coming of Christ. *That* is when the angels will worship Him.

- And remember, these are quotes from the Greek OT. This one is from Ps. 97:7. Psalm 97 is a psalm that speaks of the future righteous reign of the Messiah. And it is in this context that the angels will worship Him.

- But the main point that the author of Hebrews is making, is that if the angels worship Him, then He must be greater. And beyond that, if He is greater than they are, then the covenant He brings is greater than the covenant they brought.

- Even though Christ (in His first advent) humbled Himself, and made Himself for a while lower than the angels, some day in the future they will all worship Him. In Ps. 97:7 the psalmist predicted that all the angels would worship the Lord’s Christ.

- Someone might ask, “Haven’t the angels always worshipped Christ?” Yes, they have, but they have worshipped Him as God. However, in the future there will be a unique worship of Him as they sing a “new song” of praise to Him as Redeemer and consummator of history.

- That is why you see the angels (in the Book of Revelation) joining the saints in singing a new song with the words, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.”

- There will be a new sense in which they will worship Him. But the point (here in Hebrews 1) is that if the angels worship Him, then He must be God – and therefore He is higher than they are. Only God is to be worshipped, and the worship of Christ by the angels verifies His deity.

- Now, I have to deal with this word “first-born” (in Heb. 1:6) – although, if you have been around this church for very long you probably already understand this concept.

- This is one of the favorite proof-texts of the cults, because they use it to make their case that Jesus is *not* equal with God the Father. They use it to deny the doctrine of the Trinity.

- They say, “See, Jesus was born just like the rest of us.” But the word “first-born” (in Scripture) does *not* mean He was the first one born. Even historically, we know that is *not* true. There were millions born before He was in history.

- But this word “prototokos” has nothing to do with time. It has to do with preeminence. It has to do with position. It is literally a title, meaning “the chief one.”

- In Col. 1:15, where it says, “He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creation,” that doesn’t mean that Christ was the first one created (or that He was even created at all). It means He is the preeminent One.

- This concept was connected with the first-born because it was the first-born son that was heir to the father’s household. But we know from Scripture that it was not always the first son born that was considered the first-born in this way.

- Esau was older than Jacob, but it was Jacob who became the prototokos. And in Gen. 49:3 we find a good definition of this. It says, “Reuben, you are my first-born; my might and the beginning of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.”

- That’s the whole idea: Might, strength, dignity, power, preeminence – this is what the author of Hebrews is talking about. The word “first-born” (in Heb. 1:6) is *not* a time word, it is a right-to-rule word. It is an authority word.

- And Jesus Christ is the supreme “prototokos.” He has the supreme right to rule. He is the only worthy One who can open the title deed to the earth and reclaim all that is His ultimate inheritance.

- And (by the way) if Jesus truly is the supreme One – and He is worthy of the worship of all the angels – then surely He is worthy of *your* worship (and mine)! Some day every knee will bow to Him, and every tongue will confess He is Lord. But for *many*, it will be too late. They will confess Him in judgment – and then face the eternal punishment for rejecting Him.

- Ah, but you don’t have to be in that number. You can confess Him now as your Savior and Lord. You can bow your knee to Him now – and receive the eternal life He has to offer.

- So we see the excellence of the Son, and we see it in His relationship as Son, and in His return as Son. But secondly, we see:

II. THE ENTHRONEMENT OF THE SON (vv. 7-9)

- The key phrase in vv. 7-9 is the phrase, “Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever” (in v. 8). This phrase is directed to the Son. This gives us the *orientation* of this section of chapter one. And the author of Hebrews says two things about this throne. First of all we see:

A. The Angels Before the Throne (v. 7)

- Look with me at v. 7, “And of the angels He says, ‘Who makes His angels winds, and His ministers a flame of fire.’” The point that is being made (here) is that the angels are “His ministers” while Jesus is the Son.

- The quote (here) is from Ps. 104:4. The word for “winds” is the word “pneuma” (in the Greek) and *can* mean “spirits.” This may point to the invisible nature of their work.

- The word for “ministers” is the word “leitourgos” (from where we get our word “liturgy”) which was used of the priests ministering in the temple, or anyone who rendered public service.

- The concept of “a flame of fire” is interesting. This literally points to “the burning ones.” That is what the term “seraphim” means. It means “burning ones.” It likely points to their holiness.

- But the whole point (here) is that the angels are *not* the ones sitting on the throne – they are *before* the throne, serving the One who is sitting on the throne – the Lord Jesus Christ.

- Theologians (at times) have mentioned the idea of “presence angels,” such as what we find in Luke 1:19, where the angel Gabriel declared, “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God.”

- These are angels who stand *before* the throne of God, but they are *not* God. They are His servants – His ministers. Ah, but the author of Hebrews moves on from that to the contrast. In vv. 8-9 we see:

B. The Son Upon the Throne (vv. 8-9)

- Verse 8, “But of the Son *He says*, ‘Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever...’” (Stop right there.) This is one of the greatest affirmations of the deity of Christ anywhere in Scripture!

- You can’t get any clearer than this! Here it says that this is the Son is God, and that His throne is forever. Jesus is

eternal God! This is one of the most important statements in all the Word of God!

- Listen, those who say that Jesus was just a man, or that He was an angel who became a god (small “g”) are absolutely wrong! Those who claim that He was just a prophet or just a good teacher of moral principles are just as wrong. He is fully God and He sits on an eternal throne.

- This is God the Father, saying to God the Son, “Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever.” This is an undeniable proclamation of the deity of Christ. In fact, it is (perhaps) the clearest, most powerful, and irrefutable proof of the deity of Christ given anywhere in the Bible.

- And yet, it is in agreement with Jesus’ own claims to deity and the apostolic witness of His deity (given elsewhere in the NT).

- Some people think (erroneously) that Jesus never made any claims to deity, but that is completely false. When Jesus said (in John 10:30) “I and the Father are one,” the Jews knew exactly what He was claiming because they took up stones to stone Him.

- In v. 33 it says, “The Jews answered Him, ‘For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself out *to be* God.’”

- In John 5:18 the Jews were trying to kill Him “because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.”

- Jesus clearly made claims to deity and there can be no mistake about that. But then the apostles came afterward and were just as clear. Paul wrote (in Titus 2:13), “we wait for the blessed hope-- the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ...”

- The Apostle John wrote (in 1 John 5:20), “And we know that the Son of God has come, and has given us understanding, in order that we might know Him who is true, and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life.”

- How anyone can claim that Jesus and His apostles never declared His full deity is beyond me! It’s about as clear as it can get. So the angels are *before* the throne, but He (as God) is seated *upon* the throne.

- But let’s go on in v. 8, “But of the Son *He says*, ‘Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom.’”

- The Son of God sits on His eternal throne, and His scepter is that of righteousness. Go on to v. 9, “Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore

God, Thy God, hath anointed Thee with the oil of gladness above Thy companions.”

- This speaks, *not only* of His perfect life (and His inherent righteousness) but also of His motives. He *loves* righteousness and *hates* lawlessness. These two always go together.

- If you love God’s *right* standards, you will hate *wrong* standards. You cannot truthfully say, “I love righteousness but I also love sin.” Jesus hates sin as surely as He loves righteousness.

- And listen, the more we become conformed to the image of Christ, the more we will be like Him in this regard. Our attitudes toward righteousness and lawlessness demonstrate to what degree we are becoming like Him.

- Now, v. 9 tells us this is why Jesus was anointed above His companions. Some people think the word “companions” (here) refers to men, but we need to remember that the context in this chapter is angels. This entire chapter is a contrast between the Son and the angels.

- There is no doubt that this is just another way of saying that Jesus is greater than the angels. The Greek word for “companions” simply means “associates” (those around His throne). The angels are His heavenly companions (and He is superior to them).

- Now, the idea of being “anointed” is a reference to His enthronement as King. In Ps. 2:2 Jesus is referred to as the Lord’s “anointed.” This means He is the Messiah. The word *Messiah* is a transliteration of the Hebrew word for “Anointed One.” The word *Christ* is a transliteration of the Greek word for “Anointed One.”

- Now, we’re going to have to stop here for today – but the real question is, “Do you know Him as King of your life?” He is enthroned in heaven – is He enthroned on your heart?

- MAKE APPEAL

- PRAYER