

Hebrews

Christ is Superior to Angels (Part 1)

Hebrews 1:1-4

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INTRODUCTION:

I want you to remember that the book of Hebrews was written to Jewish people; primarily to Jewish believers, but also with Jewish unbelievers in mind. It was with the purpose of convincing them that the new covenant is better than the old covenant. That Jesus Christ is the better priest, and the better mediator, and that He is the final priest and the final sacrifice at the same time. So, throughout this book, we have a comparison between the new covenant and the old covenant, and between Jesus Christ and everybody else, to show that Jesus is superior. Now, in our first message dealing with the first three verses, we saw that Jesus Christ is superior to everything and everybody, which pretty well covers it all. Then, beginning to unfold all of the "everybodies" that He is superior to, we come to verses 4-14.

All Stand and Read Scripture

Hebrews 1:1-4 (NASB95)

1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, ² in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world. ³ And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

Prayer

The Holy Spirit teaches us here that Jesus Christ is superior to angels. Man is a wonderful and an amazing creation, certainly higher than the plants and the animals, whether simple animals or complex animals; higher than any other material creation in this world. But above man there is yet another created group even higher than man, and that created group are the angels. Angels have a place that is higher than men. Some fell with Satan and became demons. The remaining angels are no longer subject to sin. They are holy, powerful, and wise. They do not suffer the infirmities that men suffer with. And so, they are specially created spirit beings, made by God before men were ever created. They were in the heavens, in fact, watching, when God was doing the creating, when He was making the world, and they were made higher than men - at least, higher than fallen men.

BODY:

I. Who are Angels?

Now, to begin, I want to give you a brief theological look at angels. I will be reading several passages from the scripture that describes them. I cannot expect you to keep up so I suggest that you listen carefully and read the scriptures when you get back home.

Angels are spirit beings, and Jesus said that a spirit does not have flesh and bones. Consequently, angels do not have flesh and bones like humans but they do have some sort of a body. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15 that they have both bodies of the earth, and bodies of the heavens.

Angels have a type of form that can be modified. They are even capable of appearing in a human form. We see this in Hebrews 13.

Hebrews 13:2 (NASB95)

² Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

They also **appear** in an angelic form. Remember the angel that Matthew describes, at Christ's resurrection - the one who was there when the stone was rolled away?

Matthew 28:2-4 (NASB95)

² And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. ³ And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. ⁴ The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men.

When we say that angels are spirits, we do not necessarily mean that they have no form. They can put on a form that can be seen by human eyes, they can manifest themselves as a human, and they can manifest themselves in other forms. In the Old Testament, we even have the saints wrestling with angels.

It also appears that the angels were all created at the same time. Angels are unable to give birth to other angels.

Matthew 22:23-30 (NASB95)

²³ On that day *some* Sadducees (who say there is no resurrection) came to Jesus and questioned Him, ²⁴ asking, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother as next of kin shall marry his wife, and raise up children for his brother.'²⁵ Now there were seven brothers with us; and the first married and died, and having no children left his wife to his brother; ²⁶ so also the second, and the third, down to the seventh. ²⁷ Last of all, the woman died. ²⁸ In the resurrection, therefore, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had *married* her."

²⁹ But Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not understanding the Scriptures nor the power of God. ³⁰ For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, **but are like angels in heaven.**

So angels do not marry and have "little angels". Only men and women have little angels. Then they grow up and become anything but.

God made them. He made them all uniquely as single identities. The number of angels has not changed **one** angel since they were originally created. Though a great number of them have fallen, they still exist as they were created. They are not subject to death. Scripture nowhere indicates that they die. Scripture nowhere indicates that they are in any way able to be made extinct. They do not decrease, and they do not increase.

Each angel, then, is a direct creation of God. Both the Old Testament and New Testament assumes the existence of angels. Angels render intelligent worship and service to God. That is why they were created. They were created as a special "spirit being" to render service to God in a special way.

Angels are **intelligent**. They can render intelligent service and worship to God. They are also **emotional**. The Bible talks about angels rejoicing when sinners are saved.

Luke 15:7 (NASB95)

⁷ I tell you that in the same way, there will be *more joy* in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

So they are capable of emotion.

Angels can even **speak**, according to the apostle Paul to the Galatians.

Galatians 1:8 (NASB95)

⁸ But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

Sometimes they are pictured with wings, aren't they? Sometimes with as many as six wings. There are descriptions of the cherubim in Ezekiel chapter 10 and the seraphim in Isaiah chapter 6 that are highly unusual. Here is how they describe the angels they were seeing.

Ezekiel 10:20-21 (NASB95)

²⁰ These are the living beings that I saw beneath the God of Israel by the river Chebar; so I knew that they *were* **cherubim**. ²¹ Each one had four faces and each one **four wings**, and beneath their wings *was* the form of human hands.

Isaiah 6:1-2 (NASB95)

⁶ In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. ² **Seraphim** stood above Him, each **having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew**.

It is clear that Ezekiel and Isaiah were having trouble accurately describing the amazing visions they saw of heaven and the angels. So it appears that some angels (Cherubim and Seraphim) may have wings. However, as spirit beings, it is unclear as to why the angels would require wings. A spirit being does not need wings in order to fly. The angels are not bound by the laws of the physical universe. Thus we should not limit what the angels can or cannot do based on our limited understanding of the wings some angels possess as described in the Bible.

Now, according to Mark and to Jude, they have a special abode in the heavens.

Mark 13:32 (NASB95)

³² But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father *alone*.

Jude 6 (NASB95)

⁶ And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day,

There are angelic beings inhabiting the universe. They were created long before mankind, and there are a very large number of them. Even after one third of them fell with Satan, there are still a very large group of holy angels left. This is how Daniel described their numbers.

Daniel 7:10 (NASB95)

¹⁰ “A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And the books were opened.

John also gave us a hint as to the vast number of them.

Revelation 5:11 (NASB95)

¹¹ Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands,

Just take ten thousand times ten thousand, and just keep adding thousands of zeroes - there are a lot of angels.

You say, “How many are there?”

I will tell you. There are exactly enough to get the work done. There is not one loafing angel. They are more powerful than men, and men must call on divine power to deal with them, especially fallen ones.

Ephesians 6:10-13 (NASB95)

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. ¹³ Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm.

They are highly organized, and they are divided into ranks. There are cherubim, seraphim, and living creatures. They probably all have names. The scriptures give us the names of some of them: Gabriel, Michael, and Lucifer. Michael is the head of the armies of heaven, and Gabriel is called the mighty one. They are seen in Scripture as spectators at all redemptive events. They minister to God, and they do His bidding.

They ministered to Christ in His humiliation. Remember, at the conclusion of His temptation, the Bible says, “**and angels came and ministered unto Him.**” They also minister to the saved.

How?

The Bible says that they watch the church, and they watch the preacher. They also aid the church by answering prayer, delivering from danger, encouraging Christians, and protecting children. So some angels have been assigned to be guardian angels. They also minister to the unsaved, by announcing judgment and afflicting it. These have been assigned to be judgment angels.

So, that is a brief biblical look at angels.

You may be wondering...why so much emphasis on angels?

II. Why so Much Emphasis on Angels?

The Jewish people, at the time that this Epistle was written, had a little bit different view than what the scriptures reveal. As many of their views had begun to wander from the basic Old Testament writings. And they came up with some interesting views of angels, so that when the writer of Hebrews is writing, He is writing not only with a true backdrop of a biblical view of angels, but he is writing against a backdrop of the Jewish common concept of angels.

Now, the Jews did believe that the angels were very important to the Old Covenant. And they had always esteemed angels as the highest beings next to God. They believed that angels were the mediators between men and God. They believed, for example, that God lived surrounded by angels. They believed that angels were really the beings who are instruments in bringing God's word and the working of God's will into the universe and to men. They believed that they were made of a fiery substance like blazing light, which may not be far from wrong.

They believed that angels were created. They believed that they did not eat and drink, and they also believed that they did not have **little** angels. They believed that angels were God's council, and that God rarely did anything without asking the angels.

But one more thing needs to be noted, and this is the particular backdrop against which the book of Hebrews is written in reference to angels. The Jews also knew that the old covenant and the Old Testament was brought to them from God by angels. And this, above everything else, exalted the angels in the mind of the Jews. They believed that the angels were the mediators of their covenant with God; that angels kept the administration running between them and God, all the time, and so they had a lofty view of angels.

And to show you that they believed this, look what Luke tells us in Acts during Stephen's sermon indicting Israel.

Acts 7:51-53 (NASB95)

51 "You men who are stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears are always resisting the Holy Spirit; you are doing just as your fathers did. 52 Which one of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? They killed those who had previously announced the coming of the Righteous One, whose betrayers and murderers you have now become; 53 you who received the law as ordained by ...What?... angels, and yet did not keep it."

Also Paul told the Galatians the same thing.

Galatians 3:19 (NASB95)

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 would come to whom the promise had been made.

So the old covenant was brought to man and maintained by angelic mediation. The angels ministered between God and men to carry on the work of the old covenant and the Jews knew this. Thus the Jews believed in angels.

Some of them believed in angels to such a degree that they actually worshipped angels. This developed into a heresy known as Gnosticism. Gnosticism, with many other things, involved the worship of angels, and Gnosticism reduced Jesus Christ to an angel.

Paul addressed this to the Colossians warning them to not get trapped into worshipping angels.

Colossians 2:18 (NASB95)

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,

And so, you see, they had exalted angels to the place where some were worshipping angels and others were considering it.

CONCLUSION:

Now, I hope you see that the Jewish mind considered angels as extremely exalted and important. 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.

Do you see that? That becomes his whole purpose of writing verses 4 to 14 and other verses scattered throughout Hebrews.

And that is where we will start next week, Lord willing.

The author must show that Christ was the bearer of a new covenant that is better than the old. The new covenant requires that you understand that He was sacrificed once for all, and became our ultimate high priest. We must believe in Him by faith, accept what He did for us on the cross, and believe in Him by faith. The new covenant is better than the old, because Christ is a new mediator, better than the old mediators, who were angels. Christ must, then, be better than angels. And so, the writer sets out to do this, and he does it beautifully in verses 4 to 14, by using...**guess what?**...the Old Testament. He proves the superiority of Christ over angels by using seven Old Testament passages to verify it.

He wisely uses the Old Testament to show the Jews from their own testament that Christ is a better mediator. And thus, the argument is powerful.

He is Lord.