



## “The Preeminence of Jesus Christ” (Hebrews 1:1-2:4)

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I had a wonderful time this morning after completing my regular devotions of simply reading the entire letter of Hebrews in one sitting. I recommend that you do the same. Hebrews was written to a group of Jewish believers that had come to Christ through apostolic missionaries. The author is unknown. Several have been suggested by scholars over the years (Paul, Barnabas, Silas, Apollos, Luke, and others), but we simply do not know. Ultimately, it was the Holy Spirit (II Peter 1:21). We know from Heb.2:3b that the people who led this group of Jews to Christ were personal witnesses of His ministry. At the end of chapter five, the writer rebukes these believers for having not grown as they should have, encouraging them to leave the elementary teachings about Christ and go on to maturity.

Use of present tense when referring to the Levitical priesthood tells us that the sacrificial system was still in operation when the letter was composed. The temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, so the writing took place before this. Heb.13:23 says that Timothy has just been released from prison, and this taken along with passages like Heb.10:32-39; 12:4; & 13:3 tells us that these Christians faced some pretty severe persecution. Again and again in this letter they are encouraged to endure until the end, because in the end it will be worth it all.

Hebrews is a study in contrast between the imperfect provisions of the Old Covenant and the better provisions of the New Covenant. The Old Covenant is, of course, the Law of Moses, and the New Covenant salvation is solely by grace through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. Having accepted Christ as Savior, these Jews faced not only government persecution, but persecution from fellow Jews, especially the religious leaders. So they were rejected socially, kicked out of the synagogue, not allowed to communicate with a priest, rendered unclean, and therefore unable to participate in the sacrifices at the temple. They are encouraged, in spite of their sufferings, to hold fast to their faith in Jesus, and because Jesus is a greater priest, they have entered into a better covenant, and they serve and worship at a heavenly altar and temple.

Gal.3:19 tells us that angels were involved in the giving of the Mosaic Law. Jews in biblical history had a very lofty view of angels, as well they should. In creation, angels rank higher than man (see Heb.2:6-8a). Verse 14 tells us that angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation. They are created beings, but they have celestial bodies (I Cor.15:40). After Jesus' resurrection, He assured his disciples that He was indeed alive “in the flesh,” a human body. He said that a spirit does not have flesh and bones as He had. Satan is an angel, but of course a fallen one. And when He fell, He led a host of other angels in rebellion against God. Angels are created with rank, and rank also determines how powerful they are (see Eph.6:10-12). Though they do not have an earthly body, they have a form. This is mysterious,

because they can sometimes appear as human (Hebrews 13:2; Gen.18-19). We also know that they are capable of emotion (rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents). They love to investigate prophecy (I Peter 1:12). They do not procreate (Matthew 22:30). In my devotional reading this morning, I was reading Matthew 13:37-42, 47-50. Fascinating stuff! Matthew 28:2 says that when the angel came from heaven to roll back the stone after the resurrection, there was a violent earthquake. Wow! Could it be that the increase in earthquakes prophesied about the end times is simply an increase in angelic activity from heaven to earth, and earth to heaven? Remember that Jacob saw a vision of angels ascending and descending from heaven to earth. When Daniel saw a vision of an angel, he said had no strength left, his face turned deathly pale, and he fell into a deep sleep (he fainted). The description of the angel's appearance was "His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the voice of a multitude." See Daniel 10:4-21.

Some Jews went too far in their view of angels and ended up worshipping them (Col.2:18). As powerful and majestic as angels are, it would be easy to do. Even John the apostle almost did (see Revelation 19:9-10).

If Christ is the mediator of a better covenant, then He must be greater than the angels, because angels mediated the first covenant. This is pretty much the main point of Hebrews chapter one. The writer will cite 7 OT passages proving that Christ is greater than the angels. The quotes are from the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT), and that is why the wording may be a little different than the translation we are reading from.

## THE TEXT

vv.1-4 What an amazing four verses to open with! In these few verses, the writer declares Christ as being the heir of all things, the One through whom God created the universe, the One who sustains all things by His powerful word. Col.1:17 says that in Him all things hold together. If the earth's rotation slowed down just a little bit we would alternately freeze and burn. The sun has a surface temperature of 12,000 degrees Fahrenheit. If it were any closer or further we would ultimately freeze or burn. Our globe is tilted at an exact angle of 23 degrees, which enables us to have four seasons. If it weren't tilted like that, vapors from the ocean would move north and south and pile up monstrous continents of ice. If the moon did not remain in its exact distance from the earth, the ocean tide would inundate the land completely twice a day. If the ocean floor slipped a few feet deeper than it is, carbon dioxide and the oxygen in the earth's atmosphere would be completely absorbed and no vegetable life would exist on earth. If the atmosphere did not remain constant, many of the meteors which now are harmlessly burned up when they hit our atmosphere would constantly bombard us and we'd all have to live underground. Jesus Christ is the being who holds all this stuff together!

He is the radiance of God's glory. Some translate this "reflection," but radiance is the perfect translation of the word, because reflection and radiance are vastly different. The moon reflects the radiance of the sun, but the sun radiates the source of what the moon reflects. So Jesus does not simply reflect the glory of God, He is a source of it. I can only imagine what it was like for Peter, James, and John on the Mount of Transfiguration. Read Rev.1:13-15. He is also the "exact representation" of God's being. If you want to know what God is really like, just look at Jesus. Phillip asked Jesus to show him and the apostles the Father, and Jesus replied, "If you've seen me you've seen the Father.

In the past God spoke to the people of Israel through the prophets, but now He has spoken through His Son. The Son is “the last word,” if you will. And what is the Son’s message? That what the Law was unable to do, the Son has accomplished – provision for purification from sin. The Law, put into effect through angels, was not able to do for man what man was striving for, to be pure, to be holy, to be righteous before a holy God.

As a man, Jesus became as much superior to the angels as the name He has inherited is superior to theirs. His name is greater than Michael, Gabriel, Lucifer, etc. What name is that? Read Hughes, p.37, top. Now read Phil.2:8-11. Refer to Acts 4:12.

v.5a Now the writer begins his *proof* that Jesus Christ is greater than the angels. This is a fascinating prophecy about the Messiah from Psalm 2:7. It refers to the incarnation, when by the Holy Spirit the virgin Mary conceived a child – “the only begotten of the Father.”

v.5b See II Samuel 7:11b-16. This is a prophecy that goes beyond the kingdom under Solomon, referring to the kingdom of the Christ who will be a direct descendant of King David.

v.6 People like the Jehovah’s Witnesses use this verse in an attempt to prove that Jesus Christ is a “god” who was created by the Father. Not only does this not agree with other clear Scriptures that declare Jesus Christ as God very God (John 10:30-33; Rom.9:5), it violates the meaning of the word used here, and it ignores the fact that God clearly communicates in His Word that He alone is to be worshipped.

\* “Firstborn” does not refer to time but position/authority. The Hebrew equivalent is used when referring to Jacob and Esau. Esau was the first to be born, yet God ordained that Jacob be granted the rights of the firstborn. Col.3:18 and Rev. 1:5 refer to Jesus as the “firstborn” from the dead. Jesus obviously was not the first human being to be raised from the dead (Lazarus, widow’s son in the days of Elisha, widow of Nain, lots of people after the resurrection), but He is the preeminent one from the dead.

\* Deut.32:43 in ESV = “bow down to him, all gods.”

\* When John fell to worship the angel in Rev.19 he was told to “worship God.” In Deut.32:39b and Isaiah 45:5 that He alone is God and there is no other. In Isa.42:8 He says that He will not give His glory to another. Yet when the Magi came to that babe born in Bethlehem, they bowed and worshipped Him. See Micah 5:2 (from “days of eternity”).

vv.7-9 God the Father refers to the Son as God.

vv.10-12 See Isaiah 44:24; This reminds us of a time coming when this present creation will be changed, and Jesus Christ is the one who will change it (see Isa.9:7). I cannot wait for that day!

v.13 This is from Psalm 110 and it refers to the Christ. In the OT tabernacle, there was no place for the priests to sit. There is a clear reason for this (see Hebrews 10:11-14). The ministry of the priests under the Old Covenant was never finished, therefore they could not sit down. But Jesus completed the work that the Law could not accomplish, and He is now seated at the right hand of the Father. His right hand is the most supreme seat of honor (Phil.2:9-10). One day, in the fullness of time, the Father will make all His enemies a footstool for His feet.

v.14 Angels, though higher ranking as created beings, are yet ministering spirits who serve those of us who will inherit salvation. WOW! Matthew 18:10 suggests that we all have personal angels assigned to us. But as important, as majestic, as powerful as angels are, Jesus Christ is greater. Why? Because of who He is, and what He has accomplished. He is the heir of all things, and through faith in Him, I am a joint heir with Him. He is the Son of God, and He is God, the Son. He is a high priest after the order of Melchizedek, without beginning of days or end of life. Micah 5:2 prophesied of His birth in Bethlehem, telling us that his origins are “from eternity.” He is the “firstborn,” and as such He is to be worshipped. He is the Creator, and one day He will roll up the present heavens like a garment, and afterward create new heavens and a new earth, and nothing but righteousness will dwell there. He is the mediator of a better covenant by His shed blood, and through faith in Him I am clean, holy, forgiven. He is the One exalted to the highest place, with a name above every name, and one day all creation will bow before Him. He is THE LAST WORD. Read 1:1a, then 2:1-4

## II. THE MESSAGE (2:1-4)

### CONCLUSION

He came from the bosom of the Father to the bosom of a woman. He put on humanity that we might put on divinity. He became Son of man that we might become sons of God. He was born contrary to the laws of nature, lived in poverty, was reared in obscurity. He had no wealth or influence and had neither training nor education in the world schools. His relatives were inconspicuous and unimportant. In infancy, He startled a king. In boyhood, He puzzled the learned doctors. In manhood, He ruled the course of nature. He walked upon the billows and hushed the seas asleep. He healed the multitudes without medicine and made no charge for His services. He never wrote a book, yet all the libraries of the world could not hold the books that could be written about Him. He never wrote a song, yet He has furnished the theme for more songs than all songwriters together. He never founded a college, yet all the schools together cannot boast of as many students as He has. He is the star of astronomy, the rock of geology, the lion and the lamb of zoology, the harmonizer of all discords, and the healer of all diseases. Herod could not kill Him. Satan could not seduce Him. Death could not destroy Him, and the grave could not hold Him.