

October 5, 2014
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Hebrews
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Hebrews 1:4-14.

1. In what ways is God the Son superior to angels?
2. Why does it matter?
3. Consider several examples of how or when angels from God spoke to people.
4. Is Christ eternally the Son or did His son-ship begin at the incarnation?

THE SON IS SUPERIOR TO ANGELS **Hebrews 1:4-14**

Mormonism is built on the assumption that an angel named Moroni visited Joseph Smith near his home near Rochester, New York on several occasions beginning on September 21, 1823. The purpose of the angel's visits was to deliver the messages of the golden plates which are the source material for the Book of Mormon, the doctrinal foundation of that particular false gospel.

Jibril, to be compared with the Gabriel mentioned in Daniel and Luke, was supposedly the angel who communicated the Quran to the prophet Muhammed. Islam also teaches that Mikail is the angel of nourishment and Azrael is the angel of death.

Hinduism believes there is a host of lesser gods called "devas." The word means "shining ones." These beings play the role of protecting humans. Some people might call them guardian angels.

Of course we know how significantly angels figure in Jewish teachings and traditions. Asaph referred to the manna the forefathers ate in the desert as "angel bread" (Psalm 78:25). Stephen made a passing reference to the *law as delivered by angels* (Acts 7:53). Even Satan brought up the protecting work of angels as he tempted Jesus to sin (Luke 4:10). By the time of Jesus, the Sadducees, the religious party that was generally adversarial to the Pharisees, rejected all belief in angels (Acts 23:8). But as far as the evidence indicates, almost all the common people believed in angels. The lame man lying by the pool of Bethesda certainly believed in the miraculous work of angels (according to the gloss added in some manuscripts in John 5:4).

Now try to imagine the conflict that raged in the minds or hearts of some people from a Hebrew background. They were well aware of the work of angels. They held a very healthy respect for angels. Angels were spirit beings who suddenly appeared out of nowhere, praised God for the birth of Jesus, and then disappeared just as suddenly. They could do mighty works that would strike fear in the hearts of the bravest warriors. In contrast, there was Jesus, the kind teacher and healer from Nazareth. True Christians trusted Jesus' sacrifice to save them from sin. But could He sustain them in the face of trial? Its great to have sins forgiven and all that eternal stuff taken care of, but when the persecution comes, maybe it would be good to have Michael the Archangel show up with his sword flashing.

God sent a message to those people who were beginning to face serious threats to their faith. If they thought angels were great, they should be assured that God the Son is far greater. While angels were faithful to do God's bidding, God the Son was their Creator. Will they not do His bidding? Instead of hoping for angelic intervention, these folks needed to rest in the confidence that the angels' Creator would care for them. And so do we. Would we rather be "Touched by an Angel," or walk in daily fellowship with the angels' Boss? And what happens to people who listen to the teaching of angels as opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ?

Here in the text before us, we find quotations from seven Old Testament passages (taken from the LXX for the most part) that

prove that Jesus, God the Son, the perfect reflection of God the Father, is superior to angels.

The Son Has a More Excellent Name (vv.4-6).

The author of this letter argued that the Son became as superior as His name, writing that He *having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs* (v.4). Obvious is the fact that God the Son inherited a more excellent name. We know a little about that because we learn in the context of the incarnation that Jesus Christ has a name above every name. Paul wrote, *[Christ Jesus] who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:6-11).*

That is all good and very encouraging. But we can't help but wonder, "What was the name?" We are familiar with some of the names that identify God the Son. Like the ones that Isaiah listed, *Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace* (Isaiah 9:6). Is one of those the name that is above every name? Well, yes, Jesus Christ is all of that and more.

It seems that the superior name is "**Jesus Christ is Lord**" (Philippians 2:11). He who had taken on human form was known as Jesus. The angel told Joseph regarding Mary, *She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21)*. But added to the fact that He is Savior is that God the Son is the Christ, the one anointed by God for eternity to be the Savior. And because He was obedient through life, unto the point of death, He won the right to be Lord. In this case, the title Lord means sovereign ruler over all.

Lord Jesus Christ is the title that only God can claim. Therefore, God the Son packs all of these characteristics into one name, **God the Son**. The name Jesus inherited was pre-determined for all eternity. He

always has been, always will be the Son of God. That is why the Triune God determined in eternity that He would be born as the Son of Man. That is the one title Jesus used most commonly to refer to Himself (according to the record of the Gospels).

At the same time, because of the Son's predestined obedience and work of redemption, He has also always been the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That is how John the Baptist introduced Him to the world (John 1:29). That is who John the Apostle saw in God's throne room in heaven – the Lamb who had been slain (Rev. 5:6) according to God's sovereign plan before the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8).

So when did the Son **become** superior? The writer penned that He *having become as much superior to angels*. Wasn't God the Son always superior to angels? Yes. However, this is a reference to the incarnation, when God the Son subdued His glory and became one of us. In that condition, God was, like us, inferior to angels. We know that we are lower than angels in power and wisdom. So the Son was made lower than angels for a time. We will run into that very statement a couple of times in the near future of our study. We will read, *You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor (Hebrews 2:7)*. Also, *But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. (Hebrews 2:9)*.

Because He endured suffering, because He tasted of death for everyone, God the Son proved that He is superior to angels. Therefore, the Son is worthy of angels' worship (vv.5-6). They must worship the Son because angels were never begotten as sons. Quoting the Old Testament the writer argued, *For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son, today I have begotten you"?* That is from Psalm 2:8 (LXX). *Or again, "I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son" (v.5)?* That statement comes from 2 Samuel 7:14 (LXX).

It is patently true that God did create the angels. Sometimes they are called *sons of God* (Gen. 6:2; Job 1:6). But nowhere do we learn that God ever gave birth to angels nor did He ever confer on any angel the title "God the Son." The difference is in the fact that these Old Testament references speak of Jesus Christ, born in the line of

David, the Fulfiller of God's promise to David. God promised that David would have a "son" sit on the throne of Israel forever. Solomon fell off the wagon later in life, and his posterity was generally ungodly and even pagan. Therefore, it became clear that God's promise to be a father to someone born in David's line referred to none other than Jesus Christ. So Psalm 2:7 pictures a coronation, not of David's literal son, but of God the Son who is King of kings.

That is why God expects angels to worship the Son. Quoting Psalm 97:7, the writer argued, *And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him" (v.6)*. In the original context, this statement condemned idol worship and called upon angels ("gods") to worship the LORD. An English translation of the Septuagint looked like this: *Let all that worship graven images be ashamed, who boast of their idols; worship Him, all ye his angels*. This command was fulfilled especially when the unique Son of God came into the world. A single angel came to the shepherds to announce the incarnation of God the Son. *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" (Luke 2:13-14)*. God's angels worshiped the Son.

The Son is God the Creator (vv.7-12).

No one should try to deny that God made angels with astonishing characteristics (v.7). In a statement from Psalm 104:4 we read, *Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire."* This certainty explains why angels are mighty in works and nature. God created the angels and they are His. But He created them to be His *ministers*. The word speaks of public servants, those who exist to serve others. God accomplishes His works through these millions of ministers He created for that end. Sometimes their work is so astonishing that they can be likened to wind or flame of fire. Or it is possible that they move to do God's work so quickly that it seems like they are wind. Or probably the contrast here is between the changing nature of wind and fire and the eternal, immutability of God the Son (that contrast becoming obvious with the next quote in verse eight).

Jewish traditions seemed to make angels mightier than they really are. They held them in high esteem, lower only than God. They thought God consulted angels before doing some of His works. Such would be the case (in their thinking) of God consulting the angels about creating humans in "our image" (Gen. 1:26). The Jews taught that there are angels who always stay in God's presence, and they named them Raphael, Yurriel, Gabriel, Michael. Notice the "El" endings for all these names. They concluded that there are myriads of angels in charge of everything in creation, including according to one rabbi that each blade of grass has a guardian angel. They believed that angels brought the Old Covenant to Moses. Stephen mentioned that in his sermon when he said, *you who received the law as ordained by angels, yet did not keep it (Acts 7:53)*. To Hebrew people, only God was more important than angels.

That is precisely what the author intends to prove with this letter. Jesus is God and, therefore, the Son is the eternal Creator (vv.8-12). His throne is forever. Quoting Psalm 45:6 (LXX) he wrote, *But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom" (v.8)*. Overall, Psalm 45 pictures the exaltation and enthroning of a king. He is exalted above all others (v.2). He is victorious in his battles (vv.3-5). But then, the Psalm takes a decisive eternal turn. This King's throne and kingdom are established forever (v.6). He is characteristically righteous. This can only, accurately, be said of God Himself. God never, ever indicated that angels are equal to Him. But He refers to the Son as God Himself – because He is.

That is why His throne is forever and He eternally loves righteousness. The next verse in Psalm 45 reads, *You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions (v.9)* (Psalm 45:7 LXX). No king in Israel's history had a reign characterized by perfect righteousness. But God the Son certainly will. John saw regarding His kingdom that *the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, and its gates will never be shut by day – and there will be no night there. They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean will ever*

enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life (Rev. 21:23-27).

The oil of gladness is a picture of a reign of justice that brings gladness to the Son's companions. And we are His companions. We will discover that wonderful truth when we read a few days hence, *For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers (Hebrews 2:11)*. The same thought is in chapter three: *Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession (Hebrews 3:1)*. Do we count it a privilege to be companions of the eternal Son?

Furthermore, the Son is superior to angels because He created the universe. *And, "You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed" (vv.10-12a)*. That is a quote from Psalm 105:25-26. Here we are reminded not only that the Son is the Creator but that the Son is the Sustainer. He will change the heavens and earth He created, while at the same time He Himself remains constant. Even as we observe all around us in a constant state of change and decay, we do well to remember that the Sustainer is constant and unchanging. Can the same be said of angels? Where are they? Why don't they fellowship with us? Where is their message to us to teach and encourage us?

Our Creator and Sustainer is indeed immutable. *"But you are the same, and your years will have no end" (v.12b)* (Psalm 102:27 LXX). He never changes.

The Son has a Greater Destiny (vv.13-14).

Unlike the angels, the Son's enemies will become His footstool (v.13). In the fullness of time all enemies of righteousness will be subjugated. God the Father said to God the Son, *"Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet" (v.13b)*. That comes from Psalm 110:1 (LXX). Every enemy of righteousness is the enemy of the Son. The Son will have final and complete victory over those enemies according to God's predetermined plan. That certainty is especially applied to the Son's victory over Satan. *And the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur*

where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever (Revelation 20:10). He will also have complete victory over wicked people. *But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death (Revelation 21:8)*. And He will enjoy victory even over death and hell – the worst of enemies to the Author of Life. *Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14)*.

The Son has the authority to wage and win spiritual warfare because He is sitting at the Father's right hand even now. And as He resides in that place of authority, we His people wait with anticipation, fully expecting the rest of the plan to unfold. We can wait with expectation because, *After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3b)*.

God never intends to subjugate enemies to angels. *And to which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand" (v.13a)*. They are God's servants and messengers. In that sense, they are like us. God's enemies are our enemies. But neither we nor the angels are the point of focus . . . God is. Angels will always be ministering spirits. God created them to minister. Hence the question, *Are they not all ministering spirits (v.14a)*? They are ministers. The Greek word *leitourego* speaks of service. But interestingly this word describes the service the priests did in the temple or the prophets did as they proclaimed. That is how the Greek word gave us the English word *liturgy*.

Angels are spirits who take on various forms, maybe even unique bodies, and sometimes appear to be human. Yet sometimes pictured with wings (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). But most of all they are servants who will be serving God forever crying "Holy, Holy, Holy!"

Not only do they serve God, but God sends the angels to minister to saints. They are *sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation (v.14b)*. God has sent them in the past to people like Elisha and Peter, and God sends some of them to serve us Christians. Jesus Christ, the Son, sits in the seat of authority and therefore sends out the subordinate servant angels to benefit Christians.

How do they serve us? I don't know that anyone can be altogether sure. However we are told, *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares (Hebrews 13:2)*. That is the way it is now. But in the Revelation events angels will be very busy serving God.

What can this possibly mean for us? Why all the material proving that God the Son is superior to angels? The answer to that question will be the topic of our next study. Chapter two begins, *Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard (Hebrews 2:1-3)*. When angels, the servants and messengers of God, spoke, people listened. How much more important for us to listen to the message of salvation, the gospel that is authored by the Son. If you neglect it, you have no hope or recourse for eternal life.