

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Broadcast Date: 15 January 2017

No. T0972

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The Greatness of Christ: Christ greater than the Angels (Hebrews 1:5-2:5)

Good morning and welcome to *Truth for Today* where we shall be continuing our short series on the Excellent Greatness of Christ as revealed in the first three chapters of the Letter to the Hebrews. Last week, my colleague, Yannick Ford, dwelt upon the fact that the Lord Jesus is greater than the prophets whom we read of in the Old Testament and who played a major part in the history of the Israelites. Today I shall be looking at the passage between Hebrews 1:5 and Hebrews 2:5 where we learn that the Lord is greater than the angels. Before I venture into this passage however, I wish to emphasise the reason why the writer of Hebrews can confidently claim that Christ is superior to prophets, angels and the great, revered leader known as Moses.

The reasons for the superiority of Jesus can be found in last week's passage which was Hebrews 1:1-4. As Yannick told us then there are at least six statements that highlight the truth of the greatness of the Lord Jesus. They are: that He is:

- the Son;
- the Creator;
- the radiance of the glory of God;
- the exact imprint of God's nature;
- the upholder of the universe; and
- the purifier of His people.

I ought to say at this point that whenever I read or quote from the Scriptures I am using the English Standard Version of the Bible.

Having reminded ourselves of the salient points of the Hebrews 1:1-4 we shall proceed with Hebrews 1:5 which is:

"For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you? Or again, 'I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son'?"

The first point I want to stress from this passage is that Jesus is the Son, a lesson that is carried over from last week as we have seen. The truth that Jesus is and ever was the Eternal Son is not called into question by this passage. Rather does it tell us that He whoever was the Son entered into, and I quote now some words of FF Bruce "... the full exercise of all the prerogatives implied by His Sonship when, after His suffering had proved the completeness of His obedience, He was raised to the Father's right hand" (Bruce, FF *Hebrews: The new international commentary on the New Testament*, ISBN:9780802825148.)

That the Lord Jesus is the Son of God is a truth that is an essential element of what we embrace when we become believers in the Lord Jesus. Time and again in the New Testament we are presented with the identity of the Lord. He is and always has been the Son of God, the One who revealed the Father. I would go as far as saying that if we do not accept that Jesus is the Son of God we are not a Christian in the New Testament sense of the word. To underline this statement I will quote John 20:31: *"but these [words] are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name."* That seems clear enough to me!

To return now to Hebrews 1:5 where we must notice something else which has, perhaps, already crossed your mind. Why is the contrast with angels mentioned at all? Angels are not creatures that readily come to the mind of modern man but they have many appearances in scripture. We have only sufficient time to deal with one Old Testament book which details the function and importance of angels. In the book of Daniel we find that one of the angels is named Gabriel who explains many things to the prophet. In Daniel 8:15-16 we read: *"When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I sought to understand it. And behold, there stood before me one having the appearance of a man. And I heard a man's voice between the banks of the Ulai, and it called, 'Gabriel, make this man understand the vision'."* Throughout the chapters of the book of Daniel, Gabriel appears many times.

When we come to the New Testament we again find angels mentioned the most well-known being at the birth of the Lord Jesus and also at His death. Matthew 28:2-6: *“And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat upon it. His appearance was like lightning and his clothing white as snow. And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come see the place where he lay.’”*

Thus we learn again that these angels were the messengers of God yet what a message they brought, the resurrection from the dead of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We must now return to the assertion made by the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews that the Christ was superior to the angels. Almost every Jew in New Testament times would know the part that angels played in the transmission of the Law to Moses. When Stephen made his defence of Christianity in Acts 7:53 he made a comment about the angels: *“you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it.”*

This exhibition of angelic power also embellished Moses and the Law with an importance in the nation’s history. Moses and the Law is the subject of next week’s talk so will not continue with that theme. The point I am making here is the importance of the angelic witness as the messengers and servants of the LORD. Jesus is superior to any of the angels because He is the Son and not a servant.

Hebrews 1:6-7 enhances this by quoting verses from the Old Testament that outline the subservient nature of the angels when compared with God. I quote Hebrews 1:6 only: *“And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, ‘Let all God’s angels worship him’.”*

According to Hebrews 1:6 one of the tasks of angels is to worship the Son. The lesser always worships the greater so again the point is made. I also want to point out that when it says *“...he brought the first-born into the world”* the writer is making a statement about the supremacy of Christ. As one commentator has written, *“This is the only place in the New Testament where ‘firstborn’ is used absolutely of Christ ... Here it signifies that he has the status with God that a firstborn son has with his father”* (Philip Edgcumbe Hughes: *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*. ISBN: 9780802803221)

To make the contrast between the Son and the angels even more clearly the author of the letter continues by citing two passages from the Old Testament. Hebrews 1:7 tells us something more about angels which almost pale into insignificance when he contrasts it with words about the Son in Hebrews 1:8-13. Before we look at those let us read Hebrews 1:7: *“Of the angels he says, ‘He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire’.”*

In this quotation from Psalm 104:4 the intention of the writer of the Hebrew letter is to that angels minister to the Divine will with the swiftness of wind and the strength of fire demonstrating that they are subservient to God. I sometimes wonder if this passage was in the mind of Daniel Schutte when he wrote,

*“I, the Lord of wind and flame,
I will tend the poor and lame”.*

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This is number 857 in *Mission Praise*.

We must continue quickly as time is fast running out but before we do so can I remind you that you are listening to a broadcast from *Truth for Today*.

So now we move on to Hebrews 1:8-9 which tell us wonderful things about the Son. As Hebrews 1:8-9 are rather long I will pick out particular words that describe the Son’s excellent greatness.

- He is addressed as ‘God’;
- His royalty is emphasised by such words as ‘throne’, ‘sceptre’, and ‘kingdom’.
- His moral excellence is touched upon by reference to His ‘uprightness’;
- He ‘loved righteousness and hated wickedness; lastly,
- He had been ‘anointed’ which was usually a sign of consecration to some particular sacred function.

Hebrews 1:10-12 which are originally from Psalm 105:25-27 inform us about the Son’s part in creation: *“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. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.”*

The sense of Hebrews 1:10-12 is easy to understand. The Lord Jesus, being the Son, was the Creator, the One who laid earth's foundations and designed and fashioned the heavens. All of this is which is finite and belonging to time, will perish yet the Creator will never change. As the writer of the epistle says later in his letter; "*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever*" (Hebrews 13:8). We, who belong to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, belong to the One who never changes.

There is a hymn that we sometimes sing that sets out this truth:

*"O Lord and Saviour, we recline
On that eternal love of Thine,
Thou art our rest, and Thou alone
Remainest when all else is gone.*

*Yes! 'Thou remainest,' sea and land,
E'en heaven shall pass, but Thou shalt stand:
Undimmed Thy radiancy appears,
Changeless through all the changing years."*

Mrs. Gertrude Helyar

I am sure that all of us love and serve the Lord Jesus will say 'Amen' to those lines of verse.

Before we move on to Hebrews 2:1-5 we cannot ignore Hebrews 1:13-14. Hebrews 1:13 takes us to the place that the Lord Jesus now occupies. He has received an invitation that no angel has ever received or could receive an invitation to sit at the right hand of God. Some privileged angels such as Gabriel could stand in the presence of God. None had ever been invited to sit in God's presence still less to sit at God's right hand. That is where the Lord Jesus is now, waiting for that glorious day when He comes again to be acclaimed by all as the King worthy to reign. This must affect us for the apostle Paul commanded the Colossians so he commands us to: "*...seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God ... When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory*" (Colossians 3:2-4). Are we seeking the things that are above while we wait for Him?

Hebrews 1:14 describes the angels as: "*Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation.*"

I want to make just two quick points from Hebrews 1:14. Firstly, that the tasks of angels, regardless of their status, for some seem more privileged than others is to serve as "*ministering spirits.*" More impressive to me is that they are to serve those who are in a close relationship with the Son as heirs of salvation. According to Psalm 103:20 it is pleasing for these angels to serve God for they delight to do His will. Again this is a challenge to us. Do we delight to serve the Lord?

We must now rush on to the closing verses of our allocated passage which are Hebrews 2:1-5 where we find that the writer is still concerned to emphasise the supremacy of the Son compared with the angels. He also brings to our attention the reason why he has so powerfully stated the Son's superiority with angels and prophets and later in Hebrews 2 with Moses. It is all to do with the message delivered. That which came at Sinai was communicated to Moses by the intervention of angels. As we heard last week God's final revelation was through the Son. Hebrews 2:1-2 warn us: "*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 an every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution*"

Just what is that warning? It is to pay close attention to the Christian message of salvation as centred in the Lord Jesus. There was another message in former times given to the Hebrew people. That was a message from God and a covenant with Him. Now things are different for since the Son is far superior to the angles His message is superior to theirs. The phrase "*...lest we drift away from it*" (Hebrews 2:1) cannot be considered carelessly. There is a warning here against apostasy. The message brought by and concerning the Son is so important that it must never be treated in a cursory fashion or greater sanctions than those that hedged the Law would be levied against offenders.

This warning is repeated in the next, most well-known verse: "*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 it*" (Hebrews 2:3)

Here again the stress is put on the danger of ignoring or neglecting the offer of such a great salvation that h0061s been offered to the readers for that would be more serious than to ignore the Law. It would mean despising the grace of God which as Paul wrote to Titus "*...has appeared and brought salvation for all people...*" (Titus 2:11). We find similar warnings in other chapters of the epistle though I shall only mention one which is found in Hebrews 10:31 where the context is about those who spurn the Son of God. The warning is clear: "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*"

The glory and greatness of the Son along with what He accomplished by His death on the cross has been brought before us in Hebrews 1. How can we ignore so great a salvation? The final verse of the passage we have been studying today is Hebrews 2:5: *“Now it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.”*

This is the last contrast between angels and the Son. We have already learned that the Lord Jesus is the Son which is a status that angels can never achieve for they are worshipers and servants of the living God. The Son of God is the Creator of the earth and the heavens who sitting at the right hand of God whereas the angels are ministering spirits going to and fro to serve as God so directs. Now it is the world to come or the Messianic Age that is in view here and regardless of the power and influence of angels it is not any of them who will receive the reins of power. The Occupier of this place of honour is not identified in Hebrews 2:5 but He is in the following verses. It is none other than the Lord Jesus, the risen triumphant Victor of Calvary. He is the One and the only One who is worthy to take this place as His is the supreme excellence. I ask if this One is your Lord? Will you spend time to worship Him this day. I pray that by God’s grace we as believers in the Lord Jesus will seek to follow Him.

Good morning, and thank you for listening.

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