

# Christ, Far Greater Than the Angels

*A Bible Study on Hebrews 1:5-14*

**Study** Bible Studies 11 May 2008

Hebrews 1:5-14 (quoted)

Psalms 2:7 (quoted)

2 Samuel 7:14 (quoted)

Psalms 104:4

Psalms 45:6 (quoted)

Psalms 45:7 (quoted)

Colossians 1:16 (quoted)

John 1:1 (quoted)

Matthew 22:30 (quoted)

Luke 24:39 (quoted)

Matthew 28:18 (quoted)

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## The Chapter Thus Far

In the first session on Hebrews, held the previous Sunday evening, we looked at the background to the epistle and considered verses one to four of chapter one. Let us briefly recall what we learnt before proceeding with the rest of the chapter today.

The recipients of this epistle may have lived in Palestine, Egypt, Italy, Asia Minor or Greece. It was addressed to Jewish Christians who were well acquainted with Old Testament teaching and had practised the Levitical sacrifices. They were drawn to the concept of salvation but were not firmly rooted in the teaching of Jesus Christ. They had probably never seen Jesus Christ in person when He walked the earth, and were tempted to revert to Judaism or to merge with a Jewish sect.

The epistle was written in the first century, before the year seventy, prior to the destruction of the Temple, since no reference is made to that destruction.

Although it was once thought that Paul authored the epistle, the evidence points to other probable writers, such as Barnabas, Silas, Priscilla, Apollos, Luke, or someone else entirely. Whoever wrote it, however, was clearly well known to the audience. The letter combines warmth and intensity, both in its theology and in its practical application.

Verses one to four testify to the absolute pre-eminence of the gospel above the law, arising from the pre-eminence of the Lord Jesus Christ above the prophets. Jesus Christ is the true image of God, and it is through Him that we see God.

God spoke to our ancestors through various prophets and other chosen people, at different times and in varying manners, as is evidenced throughout the Old Testament.

God then spoke to us through His Son, Jesus Christ — through His life, His love, His forgiveness, His one sacrifice that ended all sacrifices, His resurrection, His ascension, and His promise to return. We need only be

receptive to His calling.

Being one with God in the Holy Trinity, Christ became the ruling heir. Our Lord Jesus Christ is therefore greater than all the prophets and all the angels.

## **The Central Theme of the Chapter**

Jesus Christ is the manifestation of the invisible God. He is the true image of God in all His fullness and perfection — the icon that fully represents the Creator. He has made God known to man; in Him we see what God is.

We see the same Jesus at work in creation, in incarnation, and in resurrection. As Colossians chapter one, verse sixteen tells us: "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him."

And when all things are put under His feet, when in the fullness of time all things in heaven and on earth are gathered up in Christ, His pre-eminence will be complete.

## **What Are Angels?**

The remainder of the chapter is devoted to establishing that Jesus Christ is far greater than the angels. But before we consider these verses, let us briefly examine what we understand about angels.

When we survey the Bible, we find four principal words used to describe angels.

**Cherubim:** often pictured in paintings and sculpture as beautiful winged children, or as innocent, chubby, rosy-faced figures.

**Seraphim:** powerful winged creatures who do God's bidding and stand in His presence.

**Malak:** in the Old Testament, the word malak appears about one hundred and ninety-five times and is most often translated as "angel" or "messenger."

**Angelos:** in the New Testament we primarily find the word angelos, which is likewise translated as "angel."

Among the purposes of angels are the following: to proclaim key events; to provide protection; at times, even to execute God's wrath; and to minister to all believers, being sent out by God for that purpose.

## **The Appearance of Angels**

Generally, throughout the Bible, whenever the word angel occurs, the

angel is described with the appearance of a man. Furthermore, only three angels are mentioned by name: Michael, Gabriel, and Lucifer. This is quite unlike the world's popular notion of angels as pretty women or cherubic winged babies. Indeed, the Bible indicates that angels have no gender. As Matthew chapter twenty-two, verse thirty tells us: "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven."

## **The Relevance of Angels in This Epistle**

It was argued, in the thinking of the time, that angels are very glorious beings, far more glorious and excellent than the human race, and that Scripture always represents them as the most excellent of all creatures. On this reasoning, since the law was thought to have been ordained by angels, it ought to be held in great esteem.

Others feel that these references were meant to refute those who believed angels were mediators — that angels could bring about eternal salvation for everyone. This noxious teaching belonged, and still belongs, to the Gnostics, who hold to many such false doctrines.

We have already noted the heresy that plagued the Colossian church and occasioned Paul's epistle to them. They placed Christ on a level with the angels. That heresy matured into Gnosticism, and the cult came to demand the worship of angels and other mystical beings.

To take the force out of this argument, the writer of Hebrews proceeds to compare Jesus Christ with the angels, both in nature and in office, and to prove that Christ is vastly superior to the angels and is God Himself. We know that in the Holy Trinity it is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — one in three and three in one. There is no place for angels within this Godhead.

## **The Verses**

**Hebrews 1:5** — "For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?"

The writer begins to draw upon specific scriptures that are fulfilled in Christ. These two quotations come first from Psalm 2:7, "I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee," and second from 2 Samuel 7:14, "I will be his father, and he shall be my son."

In Psalm 2:7, God is speaking to His Son, the second person of the Godhead. The sonship of Christ has been considered by some to be a New Testament theme only. Yet we see that long before New Testament times, the theme of the Messiah as God's Son was already a settled teaching. Psalm 2:7 is proof of that. God told us that the Messiah would

be His Son, and that He would be the Messiah's Father. Angels may be considered higher than any human, but here God is specifically stating that the Son is not created, whereas all angels were created. Jesus was not created; He existed before creation. This cannot be said of any angel.

**Hebrews 1:6** — "And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him."

If the angels worship Him, then He cannot be an angel. God would not permit an angel to worship another angel. Those angels who rebelled with Lucifer against God are now chained in a dark place, because they chose to worship the guardian cherub who is now known as the Adversary, Satan. When John fell down to worship an angel — twice, in the book of Revelation — he was told to worship God alone. So the angels worship Christ; therefore, once again, He is shown to be far greater than they are.

**Hebrews 1:7** — "And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire."

This quotation is taken from Psalm 104:4, a psalm on the greatness of God Almighty. The psalmist tells us that God created the angels as ministering spirits. Like flames of fire, spirits have no substance. One can pass one's hand through a flame, or through a spirit, but one cannot pass one's hand through solid rock, or through flesh. Christ is not a spirit, as He proved in the upper room, where He invited the disciples to touch Him. As Luke chapter twenty-four, verse thirty-nine records: "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have."

**Hebrews 1:8** — "But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom."

The Son is given the throne by the Father, who calls the Son God. This quotation is from Psalm 45:6, "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre." The Messiah is established for eternity, with no beginning and no end. His kingdom is founded upon righteousness. Angels, by contrast, are ministers; Christ is King and sits upon the very throne of God. Ministers are not greater than kings. Once again, we see that angels are not greater than Christ.

**Hebrews 1:9** — "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."

This verse is quoted from Psalm 45:7. Jesus did not merely practise righteousness; He loved righteousness. He also hated iniquity, that is, lawlessness. God's ways, when followed, require self-restraint and self-

control, yet the true children of God delight in His laws. In them they find the fullest and most joyful expression of all their faculties and powers.

Jesus was exalted above every other being in the universe — hence, above the angels. He was also exalted above the fellow members of His mystical body, for He is the Head over the church in all things. At this point in the epistle, however, the church has not yet been introduced into the discussion; the main argument thus far is to prove that Jesus has been highly exalted above all other spiritual beings.

**Hebrews 1:10-12** — "And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: they shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail."

The theme of Christ as God continues from verse eight. We know from other passages, such as John chapter one, verse one, that "in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Word, that is, Jesus Christ, was in the beginning, and created the heavens and the earth. We know that Jesus is eternal, for He calls Himself Alpha and Omega, beginning and end, in Revelation 1:11, Revelation 21:6, and Revelation 22:13, where it is written: "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last."

Though all created things will perish, God — Father, Son, and Holy Spirit — will remain. We are shown here both the beginning and the end of the age, an idea echoed in 2 Peter chapter three, verse ten: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up." And in Revelation chapter six, verse fourteen: "And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places." Even though these things must come to pass, Christ remains the same. He is eternal.

**Hebrews 1:13** — "But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?"

God will never place His angels in such power. They are ministers. God has given all authority to His Son, Jesus, as Matthew chapter twenty-eight, verse eighteen records: "And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Since Christ has been given all authority, His enemies are depicted as His footstool. In other words, Christ will set His feet upon the necks of His enemies, signifying their utter defeat.

**Hebrews 1:14** — "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

Angels, who are ministers or servants, will never be exalted to such a position as Jesus. This verse caps the entire chapter, whose theme is that Christ is far superior to the angels. Christ is King. He is victorious. His enemies are defeated. This can be said of no angel — not even Michael, not even Gabriel. We do well to remember that we do not worship angels; we worship Jesus Christ within the Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

## **Conclusion**

Angels will minister to us, the children of God, that is, to Christians.

Angels are the creation of God and did not exist before creation, as Christ did.

There are many instances of angels bringing God's message to His people and carrying out His bidding. An angel told Joseph and Mary to take the infant Jesus into Egypt for protection. Angels will one day gather the elect of God from the four winds. Angels carried Lazarus away to heaven upon his death — shall they not do the same for us? Angels ministered to Jesus in the garden just before His arrest. Angels proclaimed the resurrection of Christ. Angels opened the prison cells for Peter and for Paul. An angel stood beside Paul just before the shipwreck, comforted him, and told him that the ship's whole crew would be saved.

Angels are ministering spirits. Jesus is not a minister; He is the Lord. He is far greater than the angels. Jesus is the perfect manifestation of God and the perfect manifestation of man. Christ is not only the original Creator but the Creator of the new creation, the One under whom everything is placed. He is not only the One who will bring all things into blessing, but the One for whom all things exist. The three — the Holy Trinity — are one, in character and in work; in creation and in redemption, the three persons of the Godhead are active. He is pre-eminent and all-sufficient. We need to place ourselves fully into His care, for our redemption and our salvation come from Him, and from Him alone.

Amen.