

The Book to the Hebrews

I. The Argument of the Book: The Pre-eminence of Christ in His Person and Work, 1:1-10:18

A. The Superiority of Christ to the Angels. 1:1-2:18

1. The preface, vv. 1-4

The introductory verses prepare the reader for the writer's first argument, as well as subsequent arguments. There is a far more superior and final truth revealed in the coming of Christ than in the incomplete, partial disclosures through the OT prophets. The supremacy of Christ, the one we should listen to, is that Christ is a superior person from an unearthly origin and crowned with divine exaltation.

What we have in these verses is a seven-fold description of Jesus that spans from eternity past (a divine appointment) to divine creation and maintenance, to the incarnation and redemption, to His own resurrection and exaltation in eternity

At this point, the writer concludes that Jesus is of greater excellence than the angels because of His greater character (name). To demonstrate the point, he quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures. In a subtle manner the writer asserts that Judaism was wrong because they misinterpreted their own bible.

2. The proof: The declaration of Scripture 1:5-14

The "for" of v.5 alerts us that the writer is giving reasons for the assertion that Jesus has a more "excellent name," or character, than the angels (v. 4).

In the Greek language, these verses form a single sentence but segmented for the sake of English comprehension. The sentence is divided, then, in two by the reoccurring phrase "to which of the angels did he ever say" in vv. 5, 7, 13). The first and the last quotation are from the Psalms (2 and 110) and are alike in that they are coronation Psalms, serving as bookends of the section.

This section has seven descriptions of the Son in contrast to angels with seven quotations of the Son (five from the Psalms, one from the Former Prophets, and one from the Torah [though it may

be from Psalm 97:7). This writer is using the number seven literary device implying completeness or perfection (paralleling seven descriptors of the son [vv. 2b-3]).

- a) The first quotation: His unique relation to the Father, v. 5a
The quotation is from Psalm 2:7 expressing the positional dignity of the Son.

Angels are collectively called the "sons of God;" Jesus is the Son of God. There is evidence that the Psalm was part of coronation liturgy used during the Davidic dynasty. The fulfillment of all that the Judean kings foreshadowed is in King Jesus!

When is "today?" Does it refer to Christ's appointment as our redeemer in eternity past (the plan) or does it refer through actualization in His incarnation and triumph? It most likely refers to the resurrection, the enthronement of Jesus, his ascension.

Ps. 2 is quoted by Paul in Acts 13:32-33 where he interprets the verse as referring to His resurrection.

The heavenly voice that greeted Jesus at His baptism is repeated ("You are my Son..." [Mark 1:11 and Luke 3:22]) at the end of Jesus' ministry. From the beginning to the end of his incarnate existence, he was declared to be God's son!

- b) The second quotation: the royalty of the Son, v.5b
The second quotation is from 2 Sam 7:14, expressing the royalty of the Son. The context of this verse is Nathan's announcement that, though David could not build a worship center for God, his son would always have a "son" on the throne of David. Again, Solomon, like subsequent kings in Judea, were shadows of the great anticipated king, Jesus.
- c) The third quotation: the worship of the Son by angels, v. 6
This is likely from Deut. 32:43; it is the conclusion of the Song of Moses (there is a clearer connection between the LXX translation of the song and the use in Hebrews; it seems obscure to the English reader). Why is worship paid to Jesus when God brings Him into the world? Because Jesus is God! When does he "bring him into the world?" The context of the passage is the final judgment. The angels worship him in the annunciation to the shepherd to redeem the nations; the angels will adore the son

more when He comes to reign over the nations.

The point of the first unit, 'To which of the angels did He ever say,' is to establish three points: first, the son of God is a royal personage, a Davidic king; second, His position is a permanent one; and third, all the angels are called upon to worship the son.

- d) The fourth quotation: the subservience of angels to the Son, v. 7 Here begins new section, "And of the angels he says." If the previous series of quotations dealt with the fact of His superiority, this series with the inferior status of angels to Him.

The fourth quotation is from Ps 104:4, a nature psalm, expressing the relative relationship of angels to the Son. They are servants who serve the interests of the Son. "Winds" and "fire" are figures of speech. As God makes the natural elements serve Him, so does He those in the spiritual realm.

- e) The fifth quotation: the deity of the Son, vv. 8-9

This is what God says about angels in contrast to what He says about His Son (vv.8-9, 10-12).

This citation is from Ps. 45:6-7, expressing the eternity and dignity of the Son. Here is a wonderful verse; God the Father calls the Son God! God speaks directly of His evaluation of the Son. God speaks directly to the Son, but He does not so to angels, only about angels.

Parenthesis: Verse seven has been quite a contested verse among the translators, revealing their presuppositional biases. It can be read, "God is thy throne, suggesting the inferior position of Jesus to God, or 'Thy throne O God is forever, wherein God is proclaiming deity of the Son. The former is clearly preferable because: first, the phrase, God is thy throne, is found nowhere else in the Bible; second, the context, of our passage focuses on the character or essence of the Son in contrast to angels; third, our passage asserts several times that Jesus is God, as well as the Bible as a whole.

While Judean kings shadowed the kingly righteous one, they were only prefigured. The true king/Messiah is God's Son! The "oil of gladness" is a figure for the joy of God, the Father in the

exaltation of the Son. "Righteous scepter" suggests the nature of his rule is unsullied and justly perfect in every way.

Who are the "companions", but the heavenly host. Jesus is exalted above them all!!

f) The sixth quotation: the unchangeableness and eternity of the Son, the creator and sustainer, v. 10-12

The fifth and sixth quotations make the same point, though the reference to unchangeableness might be a reference, in contrast, to the changeableness of angels.

The sixth quotation, the longest, is from Ps.102:25-27, expressing the unchangeableness of the Son. The psalm in context is addressed to God; here it is to Jesus. The universe, like a garment that is cast aside with use, will cease to exist because that which has a beginning has an end; unlike the son, it is perishable. This is not true of Jesus; he had no beginning, no diminution; He is changeless.

Verse 11 and 12 reveal the artistry on the writer. There are seven statements arranged in inverse order in content and verbal tense.

They will perish	future tense
But you remain	present
They will wear out like a garment	future tense
You will roll them up like a robe	future
They will be changed	future
But you will remain the same	present

The point of the quotation is to stress impermanence as contrast to the eternity of the Son.

g) The seventh quotation: the completeness of the work of the Son, vv.13-14

The third subsection is demarcated by the phrase, "To which of the angels did God ever say."

This citation is from Ps.110: 1, expressing the completeness of the work of the Son in contrast to angels. He has completed His work and now waits for the kingdoms of this world to be put under His feet. Angels continuously serve; Jesus "sits."

Angels are servants sent with the goal of helping the saints of God, those who will obtain the final redemption.

Here is an interesting summary of the passage with its seven quotations as it relates to the status of the Son.

The Son: the Davidic King (1:5)

The Son: Deity (1:6-7)

The Son: the Divine Davidic King (1:8-9)

The Son: Deity (1:10-12)

The Son: The Davidic King (1:13)

Parenthesis I: Warning against drifting, 2:1-4

(The path to glory is the way of suffering.)

One of the unique features of the Book of Hebrews is the exhortatory or applicational parentheses throughout it ("for this reason," v. 5). This feature suggests that it was originally preached before it was written.

1) The exhortation, v.1a

If the message of angels brought serious consequences, it is a foreboding thing with far more consequences to neglect the superior message brought by a superior person with a superior status to angels.

Did the ancient people of God cease to be the people of God because of disobedience and exile? Does judgment cause a people no longer to be a people? NO! As disobedience to a shadowed revelation of God brought dire consequences, so disobedience to a fuller, more complete revelation in Jesus will not cause His people to no longer be His people.

2) The danger, v.1b

What are the consequences of drifting? A cold heart toward God always dulls the perception of what is best.

3) The reason, v. 2

The judgment the angels warned the ancient people of God about came true. That should be a warning to us. The ancient people did not obey the law given to them at Mount Sinai, a people-group redeemed from bondage through blood and miracle.

4) The question, v. 3a

The absence of the article before "salvation" is significant. It tells us that the emphasis is upon the quality, beauty, and the intrinsic

worth of salvation. If the shadowed revelation brought dire consequences, how much the greater.

5) The verification, vv. 3b-4

The writer gives a three-fold argument for the superiority of the authority of the gospel to the Law.

- a) The gospel is authoritative because God has given it to us, v. 3b.
- b) Those who heard this gospel from Jesus proclaimed it to us, v. 3c.
- c) This gospel, proclaimed to us by those who heard Jesus, was attested by mighty miracles, v. 4.

These were second generation believers who were living in the world of the early chapters of the Book of the Acts.