

HEBREWS

1:4-14 & 2:5-18

Introduction

God made mankind “a little lower than the angels” (Hebrews 2:7). Jesus was “made a little lower than the angels” (Hebrews 2:9). Does that mean angels are superior to men and to Jesus?

The first century Hebrews were confused about who was superior:

1. According to the Scriptures thousands of angels assisted God in the giving of the Old Testament Law. Many Hebrews therefore believed that angels had authority to rule over mankind in God’s kingdom.
2. According to the Dead Sea Scrolls many first century Hebrews believed that their Messiah would be subordinate to Michael the archangel in God’s kingdom.

You and I may not have these unique Hebrew confusions to contend with... **But people are still confused about who was and is superior:**

1. For one thing, there are groups who claim Jesus was and is nothing more than an angel. According to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, and I quote from their own writings, “Scriptural evidence indicates that the name Michael applied to God’s son before he left heaven to become Jesus Christ” (*Aid to Bible Understanding*, p. 1152). “Michael the archangel is no other than the only begotten son of God, now Jesus Christ” (*United in Worship*, p. 29).
2. For another thing, the Latter Day Saints reduce Jesus to the first and foremost of billions of pre-existent spirit children created through sexual intercourse between the male earth god and his celestial wife. Later, in order to produce a body for this special spirit child, the earth god again had sexual intercourse, this time with the “virgin” Mary, who then became Jesus’ earthly mother. When Mormons say that Jesus is the Son of God, they do not

mean that He is God the Son, exclusive of all others. In fact the Mormons teach that Jesus Christ is the spirit brother of Satan.¹ He took physical form in order to earn His own salvation through His works – just like any other man.

Whether in the first century or the twenty-first century it is important to show that Jesus Christ **is** “better than the angels” (Hebrews 1:4). The author does just that in chapters one and two. We’ll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Jesus Christ, Who Always Was And Is God, Was Received Into Glory And The Angels Serve Him, and #2 Jesus Christ, Who Is And Always Will Be Man, Has Restored Your Glory And The Angels Serve You.

#1 Jesus Christ, Who Always Was And Is God,
Was Received Into Glory And The Angels Serve Him
(1:4-12)

Allow me to make two clear doctrinal statements as we begin.

1. First: The Bible teaches the Trinity. God is three Persons; each Person is fully God; and there is only one God. The trinity is in one sense a mystery that we will never be able to understand fully; but it is a fact clearly and unmistakably taught in Scripture as God gives a progressive revelation of Himself.
2. Second: The Bible teaches the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. “Incarnation” is from a Latin word meaning *to make flesh*. It is the act of God whereby He took to Himself a human nature. In His incarnation Jesus Christ was fully God *and* fully man in one Person, **and will be so forever**.

These truths are simple to discover as you read the inspired Word of God:

1. As for the trinity, there are multiple passages where God is called “one God”; yet there are also multiple passages where the Father is called God... where the Son is called God... and where the Holy Spirit is called God.

¹ *Encyclopedia of Cults & New Religions*, Ankerberg, p. 276 & 299.

2. As for Jesus Christ, there are multiple passages in which He possesses the full attributes of deity; and multiple passages where He possesses the full attributes of humanity.

Our subject is Jesus Christ being “better than the angels.” The author states his conclusion first,

Hebrews 1:4 having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

The conclusion that Jesus is “better than the angels” is proven by three things: His *incarnation* (“having become”), His *inheritance*, and His *identification* (“obtained a more excellent name”).

You see His incarnation in verses five, six, and seven.

Hebrews 1:5 For to which of the angels did He ever say: “*You are My Son, today I have begotten You*”? And again: “*I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son*”?

These are quotes from Psalm 2:7 and Second Samuel 7:14. “Today” refers to a specific point in time. “Begotten” is the same word used in Gabriel’s announcement to Mary when he said, “...that holy thing which shall be [begotten] of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). “Today I have begotten You” refers to the specific point in time when God became a man in His incarnation through the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

The quote from Second Samuel describes the life of Jesus Christ as a man on the earth. Although fully God He humbled Himself as a man and walked in obedience. In one sense, then, He was a servant of God, similar to angels who are servants of God. But “to which of the angels did God ever say... I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son?” The answer is “*None.*” Angels are sometimes collectively called “the sons of God,” **but only Jesus is the unique “Son of God.”** He was God and *is* God, even in His incarnation.

Jesus is better than angels in His identification:

Hebrews 1:6 But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: “*Let all the angels of God worship Him.*”

“Firstborn” does not mean *born first* as if Jesus were created by God. This is the error the cults make. “Firstborn” is a title the Hebrews were familiar with. It identifies the one who is first in authority, power, and blessing. Jesus Christ is the eternal God Who *became* “the firstborn” in authority, power, and blessing over the human race in His incarnation.

To make sure you’re not confused by the term “firstborn” into thinking Jesus is somehow less than God, you’re reminded from Psalm 97:7, “Let all the angels of God worship Him.” It is blasphemy for any creature to worship any other created being. Jesus Christ is “firstborn,” but He **must be God** in order for Him to receive the worship of angels.

Jesus is better than the angels in His inheritance:

Hebrews 1:7 And of the angels He says: *“Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire.”*

Hebrews 1:8 But to the Son He says: *“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.”*

Hebrews 1:9 *You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.”*

These quotes are from Psalm 104:4, Psalm 45:6 & 7, and Isaiah 61:1 & 3. Angels are “spirits” who “minister” by serving God. They are created beings and will never do more than serve God. The Son, by contrast, will inherit the “throne.” He will rule and reign over all of creation “forever and ever.” A Son is always “better than” a servant.

We have a clear statement that God is one God Who exists as more than one Person. The Son – Who we just saw was and is God - is addressed **by God as** “God.” God walked on the earth as a man who “loved righteousness and hated lawlessness.” Yet **at the same time** it is proper to say that “God” was in heaven and “anointed” the Son on earth.

Jesus will inherit God’s kingdom; but He is also God Who created the universe by His own power. The next quote is from Psalm 102:25-27.

Hebrews 1:10 And: *“You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands.”*

Hebrews 1:11 *They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment;*

Hebrews 1:12 Like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail.”

Jesus is the Creator of heaven and earth Who is moving history toward its final conclusion. He will destroy this creation and create a new heaven and a new earth. He is “the same” and His “years will not fail.” He is eternal and immutable; these are attributes of God.

It is astonishing to me that so many people can be so easily convinced that Jesus Christ was *less than* God or even *an angel*. He **always was** and **is** God Who is to be worshipped and served by angels and every other created thing.

So far we’ve been emphasizing the deity of Jesus. But even as man Jesus Christ is “better than the angels” – *and so are you!*

#2 Jesus Christ, Who Is And Always Will Be Man,
Has Restored Your Glory And The Angels Serve You
(1:13-14 & 2:5-18)

Again the author states his conclusion first:

Hebrews 1:13 But to which of the angels has He ever said: “*Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool*”?

Hebrews 1:14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

Angels remain “ministering spirits,” servants of God and Jesus Christ. Because Jesus is and always will be man, the angels not only serve Him, they serve all those men and women “who will inherit salvation.” **They serve you!** In God’s kingdom you will one day rule over them, not vice-versa.² In verses five through eighteen this is proven as you see mankind’s destiny *revealed* and *recovered*.

{There is a warning about the Danger of Drifting in verses one through four of chapter two. We’ll return to discuss them next time. I plan to take each of the five warning passages as separate studies.}

Mankind’s destiny is revealed:

Hebrews 2:5 For He has not put the world to come, of which we speak, in subjection to angels.

² First Corinthians 6:3

Hebrews 2:6 But one testified in a certain place, saying: *“What is man that You are mindful of him, or the son of man that You take care of him?”*
Hebrews 2:7 *You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, and set him over the works of Your hands.*
Hebrews 2:8 *You have put all things in subjection under his feet.”*³
For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing *that is* not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him.

In many ways mankind was “made a little lower than the angels.” Angels are spirit beings with power and speed that excel that of humans. They do not die. They function both in heaven and on the earth.

Still, it was and is our destiny to rule over God’s creation. **No angel was ever given dominion over the earth.**

“Now we do not yet see all things put under him.” Man does not currently exercise this dominion. Adam lost this dominion due to his sin in the Garden of Eden. *But we did not lose our destiny!* It remains mankind’s destiny to rule “the world to come.”

Mankind’s destiny is recovered:

Hebrews 2:9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.

“But we see Jesus...” God came in human flesh in order to restore all things and recover our lost destiny. He did it by “the suffering of death” on the Cross where He “taste[d] death for everyone.” It is “by the grace of God” that you can be saved. It is true that angels cannot die; but neither can they save lost sinners and recover your lost destiny.

The author feels he has established that Jesus is “better than the angels.” As chapter two closes he turns his attention to the application of these truths to his readers. You’ll recall that these Hebrew Christians are contemplating a return to Jewish ritual religion because of severe persecution. They wanted to *escape* their suffering; he wrote to encourage them to *endure* it.

³ Psalm 8

Three aspects of Jesus Christ's humanity would help them endure: His *suffering*, His *sharing*, and His *sympathy*.

His suffering:

Hebrews 2:10 For it was fitting for Him, for whom *are* all things and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.
Hebrews 2:11 For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified *are* all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,
Hebrews 2:12 saying: "*I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.*"
Hebrews 2:13 And again: "I will put My trust in Him." And again: "Here am I and the children whom God has given Me."

The entire earthly life of Jesus is summarized by the phrase "made perfect through suffering." As God He was already perfect; in His human nature He was perfect and without sin. But it was "fitting" that Jesus Christ go through the "sufferings" we experience as human beings.

Ray Stedman said, "[without His sufferings Jesus] would have been able to fit us for heaven some day, **but never able to make us ready for earth right now.**" Jesus became "one" with us, fully human, that He might demonstrate for us exactly how to live by faith and "trust" in God.

His sharing:

Hebrews 2:14 Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,
Hebrews 2:15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

Jesus "shared" in our "flesh and blood" as a man not just to die, but "through death" to destroy "the devil" who "had the power of death." Satan does *not* have the power to kill you. His power in the realm of death is to hold you captive in the "fear of death." Jesus died and rose again; He conquered death; **you need no longer fear death!**

Is the devil destroyed? No. The word here does not mean eliminated; it means *to render inoperative*. Satan is not *destroyed*, **but he is disarmed!** Knowing that you have a disarmed enemy who

can no longer hold you in fear is a great encouragement when you are called upon to *endure* rather than *escape* suffering.

His sympathy:

Hebrews 2:16 For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham.

Hebrews 2:17 Therefore, in all things He had to be made like *His* brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things *pertaining* to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

Hebrews 2:18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.

Jesus was perfect and without sin; we are not. What happens when we are tempted to sin?

When you are tempted to sin you have a Savior Who knows what it is to be tempted. He is sympathetic to the frailties of humanity.

Because He can sympathize with your temptations He gives you “aid.” “Aid” in verse eighteen in the KJV is *succour*. It means *to run to the cry of a child and to bring help when it is needed*. Angels might be able to serve you, but only Jesus can *succour* you. Only He can provide the help you need to overcome temptation and keep from sinning.

If you *do* sin, He has already made “propitiation” for your sins. “Propitiation” means that Jesus has once-for-all made the necessary sacrifice for your sins at the Cross.

Conclusion

It is of great doctrinal importance that Jesus is “better than the angels.” **It is of no less practical importance:**

1. Only if He **always was and is God** can Jesus save you for eternity.
2. Only if Jesus **is and always will** remain man can Jesus sympathize with you on earth.

