

HEBREWS
(Lesson 4)
Jesus Is Better Than Angels

INTRODUCTION

We have seen in the first three verses of Hebrews that Jesus is superior to the prophets. In past times God spoke through prophets, but in the last days, God spoke through his Son. And the implication is that it was a very much better way of speaking.

In past times, God spoke at sundry times. And we saw that that means in bits and pieces - a little speaking here and a little speaking there.

And it was in different manners. Sometimes God spoke through prophets, sometimes God spoke directly, sometimes through dreams, sometimes by angels. But in the last days, God spoke through his Son.

Now the speaking of God in the Old Testament was never final. His revelation was a building in progress – one stone was laid upon another. And, there was a better age of revelation coming.

But God spoke through his Son in the last days. There is finality about the last days. Revelation in this age is final and complete. And it is the final revelation of God. And God chose to speak to us through his Son in this final age.

So, speaking through the Son is far superior to speaking through the prophets.

But now we come to the next section of Hebrews which begins in chapter 1 and verse 4. And you will see in verse 4 that:

Jesus is better than the angels.

Now remember that the overall theme of Hebrews is that Christianity is superior to Judaism. So the natural question is, “Why does Paul concern himself with comparing Jesus to angels?”

And first it should be noted that not only did God speak in former times through prophets, but he also spoke through angels.

It seems that even the giving of the law was somehow ministered by angels. (Acts 7:53) So it must then be shown that when Jesus spoke in the

last times, his revelation was better than that of the prophets and also better than that of angels.

Secondly, angels are described in the Bible as being far superior to mankind in many ways.

1. Angels are specifically suited for heaven rather than earth.

But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no not the angels of heaven, but my father only.

(Mt.24:36)

2. Angels excel in strength.

Bless the Lord, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word.

Psalm 103:20

Angels are extremely mighty compared to men. God sent angels to wipe out whole armies who dared to confront Israel.

3. Angels are God's ministers. (See Psalm 103:20 above)

4. Angels are holy. (Matthew 25:31)

They are not holy in the sense of possessing all the eternal attributes of God. But, they are holy because they are set aside to do all of God's bidding. The good angels are sinless. They inherited no sin nature like man. They are disposed by their very nature to do the will of God.

5. Angels surround the very throne of God. (Rev. 5:11)

6. God gives angels charge over the forces of nature. (See Rev. 7:1,2,3)

So, you see that angels are very excellent creatures. And the Jews regarded angels as the most exalted of God's creatures. And rightly so, angels were well equipped to do the bidding of God. In the Old Testament angels appeared to Abraham. Angels delivered Lot. (Gen.19:1) An angel protected Israel on that great Passover night. Angels are prominent in the Old Testament. They were the principal messengers of God.

And thus, the Jews esteemed angels more highly than man. And when they were told that the Messiah was a man, they might well have supposed him to be somewhat lower than the angels.

And so, Paul finds it necessary here to prove also that the man Jesus is superior to angels. Now it is quite obvious that Jesus the Creator is superior to angels. He created them. He created them for His purposes. But we are talking now about Jesus the man – Jesus in his incarnation. It might be supposed that because Jesus took on the form of a servant for a time that he would always be, in his humanity, a little lower than the angels.

Now we want to begin by looking at our text. And it says,

Being made so much better than the angels. (v.4)

This is the general proposition offered by Paul - that Jesus is made better than the angels. And an argument in support of that proposition is carried forward from Hebrews 1:4 to 2:18.

I want you to take a look at the first two words of verse 4 – “Being made.”

Now these two words make clear that something made Christ better than the angels. At some point, at least in appearance, he was not better, but then he was made better.

Now this at first blush offends our concept of Christ. For we know that in his eternal essence he has always been better than the angels. He created the angels. And, he shall ever be worshipped by angels. And the angels do his bidding. And he is infinitely better than angels.

So, in what sense does Paul suggest that he was made so much better than the angels? And when was he made better than the angels?

Now notice that it says, “Being made.” This is a participle which ties verse 4 in with the clauses of verses 2 and 3.

Example: President Obama was elected on November 2, 2008. He was inaugurated with a formal ceremony on January 20, 2009. Now, you might say with your next sentence, “being made” president, he moved into the white house.

And this is the way Paul ties in verses 2, 3 and 4.

God appointed Jesus heir of all things and exalted Him to his right hand on high. And then Paul says, “Being made so much better than the angels.” It might be better understood if we said, Being thus made so much better than the angels.

So, what is it that made Christ so much better than the angels? It was the fact that he was made heir of all things (v.2) and that he was exalted to the right hand of God on high.

Now before Jesus became a man, he was with God and he was God. And he occupied the most prestigious offices in heaven. And there was no higher glory than His glory. And he was better than the angels.

But when he became a man, Jesus became in some sense a little lower than the angels. He came down to live with men. And he came down with flesh and blood. And this flesh and blood was like unto our flesh except without sin. And he subjected himself to great suffering. And he was made so low that he suffered death and was even buried in a tomb like other men.

But something happened. His body came up out of the tomb and God appointed him in his humanity heir of all things and Jesus was raised on high and he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. This was the first time a human being had occupied such a seat. Look in verse 2.

God “appointed him heir of all things.”

This obviously refers to Christ in his humanity, for Christ in his eternal essence was always the creator and ruler of all things. But his humanity occurred in time. And it was necessary for God to appoint Christ in his humanity as heir of all things. And it was necessary for God to make Christ in his humanity so much better than the angels.

No angel was ever seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Angels are around the throne (Revelation 7:11). But they are never at the right hand of God and they are certainly never seated there. Angels are very honored to be around the throne, but it is the man Jesus, Jesus in his glorified humanity, who is on the throne.

Jesus, in his incorruptible human body, has been raised up from a position which is a little worse than angels (in a suffering, fleshly body and lifeless in a tomb), to a position which is so much better than the angels.

And look at the last phrase of verse 4.

He hath obtained a more excellent name than they.

I would like to point out another passage of Scripture that is very parallel to these verses. This is a passage in Philippians written by the apostle Paul. And it is so similar to these verses in Hebrews that it makes you think that Hebrews was also written by Paul

Look at Phil.2:6-11 (He was lowered in his humanity and then raised up and given a more excellent name.)

Note: I find it quite amazing that the Creator humbled himself to become like his creatures. It would be like us becoming a worm. But even more amazing is that Jesus agreed to remain a human being for all eternity. His mediatorial work for us will never cease. It will go on and on forever and we will have mercy and grace heaped on us for all eternity because Jesus was made like us and because he remains like us. And he serves as a perpetual high priest on our behalf because he is both God who can hold the hand of an Almighty God in one hand and man who can hold our hand with the other. And he is the mediator between God and man. And he is the mediator forever and forever. It was necessary that Jesus would become a man so that he could pay a man's penalty for sin. Look at Hebrews 2:17.

Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

Hebrews 2:17

But now, God has highly exalted him and made him so much better than the angels in that he has made Jesus in his humanity heir of all things and has highly exalted him to sit on a throne at the right hand of God.

But now, notice what else this humble man Jesus received.
He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.
Hebrews 1:4

Now, in our culture, we don't put such significance on names. When we name our children we try to pick a nice sounding name – one that will flow nicely off the tongue. Sometimes we try to pick a unique name so that it is a little different than others.

But in eastern culture, there was great significance to names. Your name many times reflected who and what you were. God changed Abraham's name from Abram to Abraham. Abram meant "noble father" and it reflected his earthly connection to his family. But Abraham meant "father of many nations" and reflected his spiritual connection to the faithful.

And here, it is declared that Jesus has inherited a better name than angels.

What is this name that is superior to the names of angels?

It appears that the superior name that has been given to Jesus is the name, "Son" or "Son of God." Look at verse 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?

It is clear here that the name or title given to Jesus is Son. And this title is superior to any title ever given to angels. Angels were servants. But Jesus is a son.

Did you know that in the Bible God never called any angel, "My Son?" Not one time did he ever do it. Now, angels collectively are called sons of God. But this refers to the fact that they are created beings. They are generated from the creative hand of God and thus they are sons of God.

As redeemed human beings we are called sons of God because we are a new creation, created from the hand of God.

But, neither angels nor men are ever called, “My Son.”

Jesus, however, was called, “My Son.”

At his baptism, when Jesus came up out of the water, the Holy Spirit came down upon him and declared, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

At his transfiguration, in Matthew 17:5, Jesus was transfigured into a glorified state and a voice out of heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

So the more excellent name that is obtained by Jesus is “Son.”

Now you should also notice that Jesus is absolutely unique and is favored over angels in that only he has a father-son relationship with God like no other. At the very best, others are sons only by creation or by adoption. Jesus is the only begotten son.

I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a Son. (v.5)

So, Jesus is superior to the angels in that he is addressed by the name, Son. And because he is a son, and not just some created being, he has that father-son relationship that no others have.

Now, before we go much further, I want to remind you that this passage is discussing the superiority of Jesus in his humanity. No one can seriously question his superiority in his eternal essence and in his eternal offices. But Paul is proving the superiority of Jesus even in his humanity. It is his humanity that is in view here. We are comparing the man Jesus Christ to angels.

In these last days, God hath spoken unto us by his Son. That is, Jesus became a man and spoke to us with a real tongue and vocal chords. And he spoke by his living example. And in verse 3, he purged our sins when he was a man. And in verse 6, in his incarnation, angels are to worship him.

And notice that our text says,

Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee? (v.5)

And we see here the statement that Jesus was begotten. Now we know what begat means. Look at Matthew 1:2. *Abraham begat Isaac; and Isaac begat Jacob* and so forth.

And God the Father said, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee."

And in what sense did the Father beget the Son? Some say this is some eternal begetting and that the "this day" is some eternal day. But according to Arthur Pink and others, the context would suggest that the begetting was when the Father begat Jesus in his incarnation. You see, Jesus was not a human being. And then, Mary conceived by the Holy Spirit and Jesus became a human being.

And so, the Father begat the Son at the incarnation. It says, "This day have I begotten thee." And this refers to that one day in history when Jesus became a human being. He was begotten of the Father. I suppose we could strain at gnats in trying to determine whether this day was the conception or the birth of Jesus. Usually when someone begat someone, it refers to the birth. But it can also be the conception. But in a moment in history, the eternal God, became a man. And he was begotten.

Jesus is called the firstbegotten in verse 6. And he is called the only begotten in other Scripture. Both words apply our minds to the absolute preeminence and uniqueness of the human generation of Jesus Christ. He is the only one ever so generated. He is the only God ever made a man. He is the only man who was ever God.

And notice in verse 6 that the angels of God worship him. They worship the man Christ Jesus. When Jesus became a man, he did not worship angels, but angels worshipped him.

So you see that Paul has made a very good start in showing that Jesus is so much better than the angels.