

Hebrews (Part Seven): Greater Than Angels

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Given 17-Aug-19; Sermon #1502

We are going to begin this sermon in John the first chapter. It seems like a long cry from John to Hebrews, but nonetheless, this is where we are going to begin.

John 1:18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

I wanted to begin there because this actually does touch on the book of Hebrews a little bit later. But nonetheless, John 1:18 has within it something that I believe needs to be explained a little bit more clearly because of that word "declared." It is about as vague as you can get as to what John's intention was there. It is kind of a word without substance because, in a way, unless you have a pretty good background of things regarding Jesus Christ, it really does not say anything. "He declared Him." What does that mean? What does it suggest?

The Amplified Bible suggests two alternatives for the term declared and both of them are much longer statements. Why would it have to be longer statements? Because it really does not say very much about what Jesus did there. Well, the Amplified translators thought that the Greek term needed to be fleshed out because the term says a great deal about what Jesus did. So one of those translations is this: "He has revealed Him and brought Him out where He can be seen." The alternative that they suggest is, "He has interpreted Him and has made Him known." Both of these suggestions carry the sense that the Father was in some way an unknown element in this unfolding story. It is as though God is somewhat of a mysteriously wrapped surprise package, saying that He was unfolded or unwrapped.

Now, James Moffit, who did a major part of the translating in that Bible, translates that same phrase as, "God has been unfolded by the Divine one." I do not think that is any better. God has been unfolded. How do you unfold a

man? So again, it does not really suggest very much in the way of an explanation. Unfolded is just about as mysterious as the word declared. So how does unfold fit with unfolding or revealing a person?

And then finally, William Barclay, who is Presbyterian minister and usually a pretty good writer, but listen to the way he translates this one word with a few thoughts thrown into it, but he translates it into a fairly long sentence. Listen to this, you will recognize this from some of the things I have given in sermons on Hebrews in the past: "The unique one [How many times did I use that word in these Hebrew sermons that Jesus is unique. There has never been anybody else ever like Him. And so it is not a wrong translation if you have some background of understanding in these words.], the divine one [it is an idea here because you know who was divine], He is nearest the heart of the Father [I am still quoting, this is all the same sentence], who has disclosed to us the mystery of God."

Now, I cannot find anything wrong with that translation. It is correct, but it is still hard. You need background to really grasp it.

Let us clarify a bit because this leads into Hebrews. The author of Hebrews wrote that whole book to explain a bit, a small bit, a tiny bit about Jesus Christ. The issue here in the apostle John's mind was not that nobody even knew that the Father existed. His existence is revealed in the Old Testament, but it is just not expanded upon. Genesis 1:26 actually gives us the first clue. Twenty-six verses into the Bible, it clearly states, saying, "Let Us make man in Our image." That is strongly suggesting co-creators working together during creation. Only God creates as these Two were creating. It had to be another God-being. No other beings are shown in God's Word creating as these were creating. For example, angels do not create.

Here are a few things to take note of in the Old Testament in regard to another God-being who is referred to as the Father by Jesus. (Of course, those things are in the New Testament.) But we are going to go to the book of Psalms, right at the very beginning of Psalms in Psalm 2. Here we find another God being inferred.

Psalm 2:1-2 Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take

counsel together against the Lord and His Anointed, saying [There is the Messiah. God being mentioned.], "Let us break their bonds in pieces and cast away their cords from us."

Psalm 2:7-9 "I will declare the decree: The Lord has said to Me, 'You are My Son [Does it not look as though the Lord in this case is the Father?], today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.'"

This, of course, does not tell the entire story of two God-beings working together on the creation. But it is being inferred there is certainly more than one God-being, especially when the Lord and His Son are mentioned together within the same verse. So first, there is a reference to the Messiah, the Anointed and, second, is the clear mention of Sonship and therefore suggesting at the very least that some sort of family relationship already existed between the two creative God-beings as Genesis 1 begins. That is, two of the same kind.

Therefore let us clarify what I believe that the apostle John intended in John the first chapter. What Jesus declared was primarily the close cooperative and creative working relationship of the Two that needed revealing, needed unfolded. That is one point. A second point is this: That John 1 tends to show that those two are, character-wise and purpose-wise, virtually mirror images of each other. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

Now, just to add a couple things here so that we get our minds clarified before we even begin more seriously into the book of Hebrews, strongly remember John 10:30 where Jesus again states, "The Father and I are one." Not one person, but one in purpose. Well, we put that together with John 1 and we know that They have been working together for a long, long time on the same project. Now, here is a third thing, just to note, and this is what Jesus was unfolding, revealing, and that They were working together, accomplishing.

We are going to just put one little nail here so that we can see a summary of what He was revealing. Turn with me to the book of John, chapter 17. We are only going to read one verse because that is all we need so that you have it in your mind. This is in Jesus' prayer. Again, these Two working together is what He has been revealing.

John 17:20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You. That they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me."

That is what They are working together on. That we all be one with Them. You cannot find any goal anywhere in life that is higher to attain than what the Father and the Son are working on. That is the most important creative effort that is going on in the entirety of the earth, and all the while it has ever existed. That is what was declared by Jesus Christ—unfolded, shown. So that is a summary statement of what They are accomplishing. That is what They are creating. Together They are expanding that kind and degree of Family relationship to others, creating them as finished products in the image of the Father and the Son.

That brief overview ties my previous sermon to this one. There is one last thought before proceeding on in Hebrews itself. I do not know whether you ever thought of this, but it popped into my mind this morning and I decided to write it down before I forgot it, because it is just kind of interesting. It is no big deal, but it is just something that is kind of interesting, at least what I think that I got inspired to see here. And that is in regard to Hebrews' position in the listing of the Bible's books.

Now, what is interesting, considering Jesus' declaration to us that, "Without [Him] [we] can do nothing." (that is an awesome statement), is that Hebrews is the revelation of the qualifications of the ministry of our Savior to us, His disciples. That book is written for us so that we will know Jesus Christ better than ever before and what His responsibilities are. Listen to this. The epistle to the Hebrews is followed by the book of James, which was authored by Jesus' flesh and blood brother. Following it comes I and II Peter authored by the leading apostle among the Twelve, and they in turn are followed by I, II,

and II John, authored by the apostle that Jesus loved. And following these comes the book of Jude, another flesh and blood brother of Jesus.

Do you see what is piling up here? The Family of the Father is writing this at the end of the Book.

And finally the book of Revelation in which the very first verse, Revelation 1:1, states that it was given by the Father Himself to Jesus Christ and He in turn delivered it to the apostle John so that these last words go right back to the Father and concludes the entire Bible.

So my brief title through this entire section beginning with Hebrews is, quoting John Ritenbaugh here, "The section of final thoughts just before the end and all its glories come. They all come from Jesus and those closest to Him in His ministry." Nobody closer wrote those final books. Think about that. And they come right at the end of the Book. They are final notes before we go into the Kingdom of God.

Now, let us look at Matthew, the 21st chapter, and we are going to read a number of verses here. Because the thing that started me off on this opening here that I have just given is this complaint that comes from the secularists in this world, that God does not communicate with His people. That is really stupid. Beginning in verse 33. This is breaking into the middle of a parable.

Matthew 21:33-46 "Hear another parable: There was a certain landowner who planted a vineyard and set a hedge around it, dug a winepress in it and build a tower. And he leased it to vinedressers and went into a far country. Now when the vintage-time drew near, he sent his servants to the vinedressers, that they might receive its fruit. And the vinedressers took his servants, beat one, killed one, and stoned another. [I think you are getting the understanding, are you not, that the servants are God's servants, they are prophets and so forth.] Again, he sent other servants, more than the first, and they did likewise to them. And then last of all, he sent his son to them, saying, 'They will respect my son.' [will they?]

But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. [That is one of the things that the

author to the book of Hebrews pointed out first regarding Jesus' qualifications. He is the heir. Remember that.] Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance.' So they took him and cast him out of the vineyard and killed him. Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to these vinedressers?" [That is Jesus' question.] They said to him, "He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and lease his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits of their season."

And Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.'? Therefore I say to you, the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. And whoever falls on these stones will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder." [What an end to think of.] Now when the chief priests and Pharisees heard His parables, they perceived that He was speaking of them, but when they sought to lay hands on Him, they feared the multitudes, because they took Him for a prophet.

I titled my previous sermon in this Hebrew series, "Hebrews (Part Six): God's Salvation Communication." Jesus is God's primary salvation communication. That is why it says of God that He spoke Son. Remember that? He communicated through the Son. Jesus is God's primary salvation communication, but so also were the prophets, but in very limited way when compared with Jesus. I did this because I wanted to make a statement before proceeding further in Hebrews that gives a small measure of evidence that refutes mankind's claim that our Creator does not communicate with His creation. That is an out-and-out bald faced lie!

Right from the beginning, He personally communicated with Adam and Eve and that clearly shows God's intention. And He most especially communicated to those who were the Israelitish families after God chose to work with Abraham. The reality is that mankind as a whole is not listening *thinkingly*, as we should. He then communicated to Israelites through chosen representatives called prophets, and then continuously through the ages to the world—the entire world—mostly by means of the printed word. And

finally, then, as directly announced to the three apostles during the Transfiguration, which was well before Jesus' death, He directly charged them that they, and of course all who followed them as a result of what they learned and taught, are to hear His Son!

This is what the book of Hebrews is about. It is written for the benefit of His disciples more than anybody else. And in this world there are all kinds of distractions flying around electronically, vocally in conversations with one another. *He is the one we listen to.* That is rule number one. We are to hear His Son, the highest and greatest of all of God's communicators. He was announcing there during the Transfiguration (whether we picked it up there or not does not matter because it occurred), the ending of the use of prophets to speak on His behalf. There was no competition for the church to hear the words of Jesus Christ. He is the one we listen to, the greatest of all of God's communicators. And so with the passing, I guess you might say, of the age of the apostles, in a way there was no one greater that God could send except the Heir.

Now, what I have just given you is an overview, essentially, of at least part of the reasoning in which whoever authored Hebrews began his labor of love to you and to me. God does not lie. What this parable that I just gave to you clearly shows is the truth that God has clearly and continuously attempted to communicate faithfully and honestly with mankind. However, mankind just as clearly and frequently rejects God's every effort but nonetheless blames God. But eventually what happens through history, we find this: God communicates in a somewhat different way, stripping Israel's advantages from them, and not since Jesus walked the earth has there been a truly strong witness made to the nations of Israel as they continued their scattering to the north and west, which is in the area that God wants the Israelitish people to be whenever Christ returns.

So what we see in the early chapters of Acts is the continuing conclusion of the rejection of the Son by persecuting the church and God clearly turning to the Gentiles by preaching the gospel to them, most notably through the apostle Paul. Well, even here we find the Israelitish Jews having a hard time accepting Christ, and thus what we find in the epistle to the Hebrews,

probably written before ^{AD} 70, is theological argument after theological argument as to why people must overcome their resistance against the very Son of God, repent, and get on with their lives.

Hebrews emphatically shows the Jews that Jesus is qualified in every way to be High Priest. That is the problem that the church faced because the Jews were to a large extent still rejecting Him. But Israel is the one with the problems, not Jesus. The opening paragraph or two in the epistle clearly shows, by stating a series of clear biblical reasons why Jesus should be accepted. I am going to give you those reasons. I gave them to you once before, but if you only got part of them, I am going to give you all seven of them that the author lists right at the beginning. He hit them with a right cross immediately.

- 1) The biggie. He is the Son of God.
- 2) He is the heir. The second thing he mentions, as if they are in the order that they need to be in. He is the heir of all things, the entire creation!
- 3) He is the actual Creator. I know you do not have arguments against these, but they are absolute proofs that Jesus Christ is qualified.
- 4) He is the brightness of God's glory. You are not going to get anybody with qualifications like this except Jesus Christ.
- 5) He upholds all things. He upholds the universe by the word of His power. Does He have the power to do the job?
- 6) He purged us of our sins. We owe Him that. We owe Him our loyalty. We should listen to Him because of what He did personally, individually, for each and every one of us. Because I know that you know that every single person is called by God individually, and so He died for you and me individually.
- 7) He sits at the right hand of God on high in heaven.

Let us look at some logical reasons, as we begin the book of Hebrews here more thoroughly, why was the sending of the prophets halted? Now,

compare these shortcomings all prophets had in comparison to Jesus' strengths.

These are easy: One, they were all beset by spiritual weaknesses. Two, their messages came to them from God. Another way of saying this is, they truly did not possess the speaking authority. God gave it to them the moment before they gave it. Three, all of them—every single one of them—was a sinful man. Jesus had absolutely no sin, whatever. Four, not one single prophet grasped the fullness of the messages directly given them. They did not think them up in the first place, God gave those messages to them. Now, I am not saying that these were not upright people, they really were, and they were close to God, but they were still men. Five, they did not understand the fullness of God's revelation and purpose. Jesus did. He knew the end from the beginning. Six, the prophets were only bearing witness of the message given. And seven, Jesus had absolutely none of these shortcomings. Why? Because He was already one with God the Father.

It is helpful to not forget the manner in which the author began his work. There was good reason why those people who were these literary sorts said that the book of Hebrews has the greatest opening paragraph in it in the history of the world. Nobody can even come close to touching it for the meaning that is there. So it is helpful to not forget the manner in which the author began his work.

It begins with the extolling of the already achieved and given qualities of Jesus Christ. This is why I spent so much time helping you to know thoroughly that the Jews were rejecting things and they had no basis for the rejection of it. The Father was even mentioned in the Old Testament, the Father and the Son. I read you that psalm. It mentioned both of them, the Lord and the Son.

This was partly because some Jews were dissatisfied with Jesus Christ being High Priest because they held Him as being unqualified. And believe it or not, number one on the list probably was that He was not a Levite. They had greatly underestimated His qualifications, but that did not stop the author of Hebrews from continuing to display Christ's qualifications throughout almost the entirety of the epistle. In very short order, the author very quickly disposed of any prophet from anywhere as being better qualified.

Now, perhaps we might underestimate the impact of Jesus' birth, His ministry, His many healings, His controversies with the Levitical priesthood, His tragic and very visible death, and His resurrection, because none of that was hidden from view. And besides that were many miracles that He performed. In addition was His institution of the preaching of the gospel, which included to the Gentiles, and the impact that had on Jewish thought about Christ personally. There is no doubt that many Hebrews were upset because of the preaching of the gospel to the Gentiles.

I personally bring these things up because this entire package was being engineered by God from heaven, and God knows when and how to advertise and promote His program and He has the equipment to do so vividly and impactfully. Besides the prophets, the rest of those selected by the author to compare Jesus with are apparently listed in the order the Jews generally held in their minds as being of the highest rank.

If you are at all familiar from reading through the book of Hebrews, first the author takes on angels. Next, the author takes on Moses, then the author takes on Joshua, and right on down the list until we go through what he felt that every Jew would have to consider before casting his lot with God and with the church. He would have to get those things behind him. Besides the prophets, we are going to go through why He is greater than angels, why He is greater than Moses, why He is greater than Joshua, and right on down the list.

At the foundation of Jewish resistance to Christ was they saw no need for a change away from the historical truth that the high priest had, under the Old Covenant, always been appointed from the Levitical family. But there was more than that to the resistance from the Jews. God does not lie. What this parable that I read to you here in Matthew the 21st chapter clearly shows is the truth that God has continuously attempted to communicate faithfully and honestly with mankind, including too with many Gentiles.

But the Gentiles seemed to grasp what was happening theologically more quickly than the Jews. That may have been because the Gentiles did not have the history, the Temple, and the activities of Judaism, blinding their theological vision. And thus it was God setting aside the Old Covenant and

putting the New Covenant into effect, that more or less paved the way for the Jews to resist. In other words, it gave the Jews an out so that they could complain and just drop the ball and feel justified in doing it.

Theologically, for many Jews, the change from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant was an awful lot to accept and digest because it effectively destroyed any reason whatever for Judaism to continue existing. Because the New Covenant was far, far superior to what Judaism offered in terms of salvation. You can believe it was an emotional uphill fight for them to overcome.

(I kind of thought of this little section of my sermon here as Mark [Schindler] was going through what he did about the stripping of the Worldwide Church of God and all of the power and authority that it had earlier as it was falling apart. It was hard for those of us who were there and were convinced that this was the true church, that it was falling apart theologically. I hope you never have to face that. It was emotional.)

Well, for the Jews, it was giving up on Judaism that they could not really comprehend, they could not see their way through it. It was an awful lot for them to swallow. The New Covenant was far superior to anything that Judaism offered. The New Covenant did away with the need for the Temple. How is that for beginnings? It did away with the need for the priesthood. It did away with the need for the sacrifices made at the Temple. Brethren, those religious Jews, their lives centered on those three things. None of those religious activities could even begin to compete with what the New Covenant offered. That was and remains having a one-on-one relationship with the Creator God. How do any of those things compare with having a relationship with the Creator God? Do we ever think of that as being a blessing? But He is not only the Creator God, He is also our Savior, and He is also our High Priest. That is high *power*, brethren.

Now if you think maybe the Jews were just being hardheaded, take note that even the apostles, who spent three and one-half years with Christ, had many, many questions even though they were there with their very Creator almost constantly during those three and one-half years. While the Jews generally

had high regard for angels, and well they might, what I am going to go into here now has to do with what the Old Testament, mostly, has to say about angels and why they were stuck on them, as we might say.

Turn with me in the book of Acts to chapter 7. I wonder how many of us have ever searched this out. I never did until I put this sermon together. I do not mean that I have not seen these verses. That is different than just seeing them or hearing them given in a sermon, but to actually search it out, a pretty fair portion of this, I had never done it before.

Acts 7:51-53 [This is Stephen talking to the Jewish leadership.]

"You stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears! You always resist the Holy Spirit; as your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who foretold the coming of the Just One, of whom you now have become betrayers and murderers, who [this is what I am aiming toward] have received the law [Now listen to what it is saying] by the direction of angels and have not kept it."

Did you know that? He is talking about Mount Sinai. "have received the law by the direction of angels and have not kept it." Now part of the reason why this says what it does is contained in the term "direction." In the King James Version that same Greek word is also translated elsewhere as "delivered": the law *delivered* by angels. The next word English word that it is sometimes translated into is the word "given." These are all in *Strong's Concordance*. That same word is also translated into this phrase "put into effect."

Did you know that angels had that much honor, and while that was being done they were there on Mount Sinai participating in what was going on. You wonder why the Jews did not have respect and regard for angels when their own Bible is telling them this. I did not know that.

Now wait on this next one. That word is also translated into English as, "angels through whom received them." They were involved on Mount Sinai, brethren. They were there while all this was going on and involved enough that Stephen had enough information to make this statement against the Jews.

Let us go to Deuteronomy 33 as we continue to search this out a bit.

Deuteronomy 33:1-2 Now this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death. And he said: "The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came with ten thousands of saints [Brethren, that word saints there means holy ones.]; from His right hand came a fiery law for them."

Moses is referring to the very occasion of the giving of the laws and the making of the Old Covenant. The term saints in this context indicates holy ones and in this circumstance that could only be angels.

Ten thousand may not be an exact figure, but there it is a big figure and there were lot of angels involved in what was going on on Mount Sinai. I will tell you, it was no wonder that the Israelites were afraid to even touch that mountain when they began to realize what in the world was rumbling around up there, and that there were at least 10,000 angels and they were involved in the giving of the law. It is no wonder the Jews had some respect for them. I will bet you there is not a person in here, including myself, who has the kind of respect for the angels that maybe the average Jew had walking the streets in Jerusalem if he was at all familiar with this and there was no Jesus Christ to compete with the angels. . . you get what I am saying here? If you start looking this thing up you are going to be surprised at how much news there is in God's Book about angels and the part that they play about what is going on here on earth.

Turn with me now to Psalm 68. We are just going to scratch the surface here. I did not intend to go into the whole thing because I was going to convince you with just a small number of them.

Psalm 68:17 The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of thousands; . . .

Might I ask you this? Let us see what you think about this. Why would the author of this psalm be describing chariots of God? Do not chariots require drivers? They do. They have got a horse pulling them in the front and they have got a driver standing on the platform in back doing the guiding.

Psalm 68:17 The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of thousands; the Lord is among them as in Sinai [everything keeps going back to there], in the Holy Place.

Looking into several reference works here is what you find. The chariots of God are, in this case, a veiled reference suggesting that angels are the chariots' drivers manning the powers of God's military might in human terminology. Chariots need drivers. So the thing that the researchers are led to is that the drivers of the chariots are angels. And again, the author is giving us an idea how many there are. There are a lot!

Let us go to The New Testament to Galatians 3. That controversial book.

Galatians 3:19 What purpose then does the law serve? It was added because of transgressions, until the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed [ordained] through angels by the hand of a mediator.

They are involved. This phrase where it says "appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator." the Amplified translated it, "arranged and ordained and appointed through the instrumentality of angels." Never forget that angels are sinless and they are still sinless. They were sinless when this was acted upon and they are still sinless. Thus we can grasp the biblical background of reasons why Jews had so much respect for angels. But there is still a great deal more.

What the author of Hebrews is showing us is that even though the Old Testament does not detail much of the parts angels played when the Mount Sinai giving of the laws and the entering into the Old Covenant was made, the Old Testament clearly shows angels pretty strongly represented. But there is much more yet.

Exodus 3:1-2 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian. And he led the flock to the back of the desert, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. And the

Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire from the midst of a bush. So he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed.

Within the pages of the Old Testament, when Christ made an appearance, He was announced or addressed, at times, as the Angel of the Lord. Now, angel means messenger and Christ indeed is the Messenger of the Lord in all sorts of universe-operating circumstances as they carry out Their purposes.

According to *Strong's Concordance*, the term angel appears in the Bible 297 times. I will bet you did not know there were that many references to angels. I have only gone through so far four or five. It is all through the Book. They are involved. We will just touch on some of the times.

Genesis 16:7 Now the Angel of the Lord found her by a spring of water in the wilderness, by the spring on the way to Shur. And He said . . .

I think that in this case it was Jesus Christ who was doing this, but He is identified as an Angel.

Numbers 20:14-16 Now Moses sent messengers from Kadesh to the king of Edom. "Thus says your brother Israel: 'You know all the hardship that has befallen us, how our fathers went down to Egypt and dwelt in Egypt a long time, and the Egyptians afflicted us and our fathers. When we cried out to the Lord, He heard our voice and sent the Angel [Again, this is Christ but identified as an angel.]; now here we are in Kadesh, a city on the edge of your border.'"

We are going to stop there and I am going to continue this because there are a great, great many more reasons why they need to be considered thoroughly.