

Why Hebrews Was Written (Part 12): The Son's Superiority Over Angels

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Forerunner, "Personal,"

The magnificent epistle to the Hebrews reveals a great deal about our God and Savior's operations in spiritual activities in which He remains involved to this day. When He invites us into His church, we may know almost nothing that is actually true about Him. However, because of that calling, God expects us to grow knowledgeable about His activities and character as He guides and serves us to prepare us for our work in His coming Kingdom. He has called us to fill a position.

Note that He prepares us for the Kingdom of God just as He prepared the apostles and many before them. From this fact, we understand that creation continues from the beginning to this very day. God had His goals fixed before He began; He has not and is not operating in a willy-nilly manner. What He is undertaking can be termed a new creation, but He is building on a small but important portion of what already exists. What He has invited us to become part of is vast in scope, a project we must not permit ourselves to become careless about.

Recall that, except for the book of Revelation, the epistle to the Hebrews was among the last handful of books written, becoming a type of final instructions, a last word before a critical time for which we must be made ready. In this vein, Hebrews serves us well, helping us make the final preparations for our glorious futures. We must not allow ourselves to waste our time by engaging in a careless approach to cooperating with God's preparations.

Even people who attend church regularly are inclined to avoid the epistle to the Hebrews for various reasons. However, we are not avoiding it. It would be spiritually perilous to do so because its instruction is critical to our growth. Recall that our Creator, Jesus of Nazareth, declared in John 15:5 that we could do nothing toward producing the fruits that glorify God without

Him. Thus, a continuously warm relationship with Him is not only very much to our advantage but also an absolute necessity. The epistle to the Hebrews provides us remarkable insight into the work and character of this One, the Son, who is so vital to our conversion and transformation into God's image.

In our continuing study through the early chapters of Hebrews, we are seeing a pattern emerge in teachings necessary to meet conditions extant in both the then-current Hebrew culture focusing on Jerusalem and continuing into the first decades of the apostles' preaching of the gospel to the world. At the same time, we are also seeing necessary instruction supplied to church members to sustain their conversion and help produce growth within the wider Mediterranean Sea basin and beyond for at least another half-century. The apostles diligently met the command Jesus gave them to preach the gospel to all the world, and conversions were being produced overwhelmingly in Gentile areas.

God was adding to His church, and though it was a great blessing to all those whom He converted, each entered the church with his own problems. Besides, those conversions stirred up troubles for the church within the native populations where the apostles preached the gospel. They quickly learned by experience that the Gentile world was equally as anti-God as the Jewish world had been to Jesus and the early evangelists. The Gentiles, too, possessed carnal natures. Even though the apostles expected Gentile communities to be antagonistic to the gospel because of their inborn religious prejudices, it was still disappointing to them when it occurred. Worse, such antagonism was potentially harmful or even deadly to some among the church membership.

Serious Trouble Arises

The Bible details that Jesus experienced hatred to the point of death in His homeland, Judea, and that hatred continued in the persecution of His disciples after His crucifixion. A leader among those persecutors was Saul, whom we know as the apostle Paul. He was converted by Jesus Christ while traveling on the road to Damascus to persecute more Christians there. The same man may very well be the author of this very epistle, written a few decades later.

However, even before the apostles preached the gospel in areas beyond Jerusalem, trouble erupted within the church because some Jewish converts could not accept Jesus Christ as High Priest under the New Covenant. In their lack of understanding and belief, they held to the concept that angels were better qualified. They reasoned that because Jesus was a mere mortal man whom they had seen walking about Judea and heard preaching to their countrymen, and whereas angels were mighty, seemingly eternal spirit beings whom Scripture mentioned and praised frequently and who lived in heaven and traveled frequently and easily between heaven and earth, they outmatched Jesus. Not least of their arguments was that Jesus had clearly died on a Roman stake of execution. That He died accursed (Deuteronomy 21:22-23; Galatians 3:13-14) was a deciding factor in why they opposed His appointment as High Priest.

On the surface, their interpretation appeared sensible and logical to human reason. However, because of their lack of believing knowledge of Him, their reasoning was tragically flawed. The Jews in Judea wholly underestimated the Jesus of Nazareth they had seen and heard. Though Jesus was indeed born of a human woman, His Father was the great, eternal God of heaven, making Him both divine and human. He retained His divinity throughout His human life; while He walked the earth, He never was just human or “just” God. As the Creator God, He had created the angels as well as humanity. He is higher and greater than *all* living things except for the Father, and He now sits at the Father’s right hand in heaven, at the very source of all power and sinless purity!

It appears from the context of Acts 15 that many of the Jews who opposed His appointment as High Priest quickly repented of their misjudgment once the scriptural and experiential details of Jesus’ origin had been adequately presented to them and decided in the council. They learned that He is qualified beyond all shadow of a doubt.

It is a historical fact that a relatively small number of Jews in the early church objected to Jesus Christ’s appointment as our High Priest under the New Covenant. In more modern times, some have taken issue with the author’s application of some of these Old Testament verses—like Psalm 2:7 and II Samuel 7:14, which we will consider below—to Jesus of Nazareth

because a few scholars down through history had a similar resistance to the idea as those Jews did. They, like those Jews, misunderstand God's revelation.

More Is Added

After the first three verses of Hebrews 1, the author was far from done adding to Jesus' qualifications to serve as our High Priest, preparing us to be qualified to work under Him in the Kingdom of God. In Hebrews 1:4-6, he zeroes in on the conflict in the minds of some at that time:

[The Son has] become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He ever say: "You are My Son, today have I begotten You?" And again: "I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son"?

Part of the reason that the great dignity of His name is far beyond that of any angel is how the relationship between the two God Beings transformed over the course of Their plan. Without any ambiguity, the author declares that the Father and Son are directly related to each other. There are no "in-betweens" as there are between God and angels. The Father and Son are one—that is, of the same immortal kind and in perfect harmony. Absolutely no angel under any circumstance can make such a claim!

It helps to recognize that the term "angels" is not qualified in any way, indicating that the author of Hebrews meant to include all angelic beings in his terminology. In God's organizational order, Jesus ranks higher than any and every rank of angelic beings that may exist, from the lowest to the highest, regardless of name or descriptor in Scripture, even to the position of archangel.

Two New Testament passages confirm this statement:

» . . . which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that

which is to come, and He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all. (Ephesians 1:20-23)

» There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him. (I Peter 3:21-22)

The Son of God

However, the very fact that Jesus, even as a human, carried the title “Son of God” is telling and therefore totally persuasive to those who believe. It immediately conveys the idea of a relationship that humans, like Jesus was while on earth, can have with God. It also immediately suggests a relationship superior to what angels have with God. Nowhere in Scripture are they considered sons as Jesus was. As Hebrews 1:5 implies, there is no record in Scripture that any angel was under any circumstance ever called “My Son”!

The natural idea conveyed by this title, “Son of God,” in Scripture is that He sustained a continuous relationship with God. Why did He use this title? Because it is true! He had maintained that relationship, which is why the author begins the epistle in that manner. The gospels show that “Jesus” (*Yeshua*, “Savior”) was His Hebrew birthname, inspired by God and revealed to Joseph and Mary (see Matthew 1:21; Luke 1:31), but at the same time, He was the Son of God (see Luke 1:32).

Among other names and titles, He called Himself “Son of God” (John 5:25; 10:36; 11:4). To this fact, we add the truth that He never sinned; He never even once told one little fib. This truth is huge and telling when we honestly consider how frequently we have “bent” the truth.

It is also persuasive because the title authenticates Him as such throughout all time. It is either true or false, and if false, we have no Savior! John 8—the entire chapter—is an excellent guide to this revelation of Himself. In this way, Jesus is unique in all the history of mankind.

As we continue to add elements to Jesus of Nazareth's pedigree, high above that of angels, the apostle adds in Hebrews 1:6-8 that God commanded the angels to worship the Son as God. He is precisely that, God, despite appearing to naked human eyes as merely human. For angels to worship someone who was not God would have broken the first commandment; they would have committed idolatry, putting someone before God. But they do worship Him! Jesus was always "more than human"; He was literally more than met the eye. He indeed is and always will be God (which is what His Hebrew name, *Yahweh*, "I AM," implies).

Interestingly, in Psalm 2:2, the prophecy declares that the One who became God's "Anointed" (the Messiah) and the subject of Hebrews 1—the Personage born as Jesus of Nazareth—is also called in verse 6 "My King" who will be crowned and reign from "My holy hill of Zion." He is royalty in God's Family and worthy of the highest honor that God the Father can bestow on anyone.

Luke 1:26-38 confirms some of these assertions:

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And having come in, the angel said to her, "Rejoice, highly favored one, the Lord is with you; blessed are you among women!" But when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and considered what manner of greeting this was. Then the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." Then

Mary said to the angel, “How can this be, since I do not know a man?” And the angel answered and said to her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God. Now indeed, Elizabeth your relative has also conceived a son in her old age; and this is now the sixth month for her who was called barren. For with God nothing will be impossible.” Then Mary said, “Behold the maidservant of the Lord! Let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

We should understand Hebrews 1:6-12 as comparisons made by the author to heap praise upon Jesus Christ of Nazareth in contrast to any angel whom one might consider as being on the same level or even above Him:

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

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

But to the Son He says: “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.”

And, “You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. They will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; 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 Christ Is Superior to All

In this first chapter, the apostle reveals the main line of his approach to the subject of who is qualified to be High Priest to the children of God under the New Covenant. He does so by using an irrefutable argument based in

Scripture: that Jesus of Nazareth is far superior even to those whom some acknowledge to be primary contenders from the created world, particularly those from the angelic realm. However, Jesus is as much superior to any angel as any creator is superior even to the absolute best of his creations. The pre-incarnate Jesus, the Word, is the Creator (Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16), and He created the angels and gave them life just as He did to all living things in this creation.

Hebrews 1:13-14 concludes this chapter:

But to which of the angels has He ever said: “Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool”? Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

Our Creator and Savior has made His decision regarding the order among His created beings quite clear. Angels are valuable and highly qualified servants who are far more intelligent, powerful, and morally pure in the roles they currently fill in His purpose than human beings are. Even so, they are not created for the more exalted offices He is creating us to occupy. Therefore, we should clearly understand He created them to serve under us in the positions for which He is preparing us. This truth is both awesome and humbling at the same time. More on this subject will follow.