

Why Hebrews Was Written (Part Ten): Christianity's Claims

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***Personal* : Why Hebrews Was Written (Part Ten): Christianity's Claims**

The author of Hebrews writes, “. . . having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they” (Hebrews 1:4). Some readers of Hebrews have trouble grasping His usage of “having become” here. The key to unlocking this mystery about Jesus’ becoming something He was not before and seemingly having to qualify to hold a position is understanding the time-linkage between this statement and Psalm 2, where God proclaims unambiguously that He had begotten a Son. Twice in Psalm 2 He is called “Son” and once “His Anointed,” the Messiah. God states this long before the human Jesus was born.

John 1:17-18 helps to clarify the identity of the Son:

For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

The entire first chapter of John’s gospel seeks to identify the Son of God, primarily who the Son in Psalm 2 is. The prophetic proclamation made in Psalm 2 points to only one Person in all of history, and that Person was irrefutably not an angel. John tells us the Son is Jesus of Nazareth.

Luke 1:30-35 provides a clarifying identification:

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, the Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God.”

The angel makes this declaration about the unique, one-of-a-kind, Person the New Testament names “the only begotten Son of God.” He is plainly named “the Son of the Highest.” He, as John 1 reveals, is also God, even as the One we know as “the Father” is God.

Though the title “Son” was written as part of Psalm 2 many hundreds of years before the New Testament appeared, God the Father assigned and declared it when Jesus was born of the virgin Mary. It occurred at the beginning of His 33½-year human life, during which He conducted His ministry.

Jesus did not have to qualify for this office in the ordinary sense. He was already entitled to it by being God both when the prophecy was originally uttered and when He was conceived in Mary’s womb and became human. The prophecy in Psalm 2 ends with His death, payment for our sins, and resurrection, paving the way for our eternal life. Thus, Jesus fulfilled God’s purpose, not of just being simultaneously both God and man but also being sinless, an unblemished sacrifice. He filled the need for a Person, both human and divine, to pay the price for our sins.

Thus, at the moment of His birth, God exalted Jesus to what He never literally was before: As the Son, He became the New Covenant’s High Priest. He was already performing the job throughout His ministry. As God, He did not have to qualify for what He already was, though He had to finish His course through death and resurrection. The problem arose for the apostles when God began calling Jews to conversion. They soon became aware of this prophetic reality and questioned it because it did not harmonize with their religious traditions.

An Overview of Chapter 1

Hebrews 1 is among the most impressive, thought-provoking chapters in the entire Bible. Knowing the background of why the author wrote it this way gives readers a clearer understanding of why every converted Jew owes Jesus Christ his life for all eternity—and the same is true for all of mankind! This chapter specifies His qualifications for the exalted responsibility of maintaining the office of High Priest. Perhaps the most impressive point is that He was already God when born!

We will undertake a quick review of chapter 1, focusing on a few chief points before continuing. Later in this article, we will focus on some thoughts gleaned from Albert Barnes' *Notes* on Hebrews about why Jesus and the Bible have valid claims on mankind's most profound attention throughout life. These claims also explain why God states in Romans 1 that humanity stands without excuse before Him—and thus, why people should seek Him and search His Word with all diligence. However, the history of the Western world records that most people have either ignored it or vociferously attacked it. A brief overview of chapter 1 will provide a good foundation for the claims.

The author's direct and indirect references to the threefold offices of Jesus Christ—prophet, priest, and king—provide a link between Hebrews' first and second chapters. Christ holds all three at once, which is impressive. He is a Leader every knowledgeable individual should yearn to serve under because, under His leadership, great things will be accomplished. Those under Him will share the rewards of His achievements.

In Hebrews 1, the author describes the Son as the One through whom God spoke prophetically as "Son" (verse 2). In verse 3, He is the High Priest who provided purification for sins. In verses 6-14, we see Him prophetically, ruling from His throne in His Kingdom, alluding to His royal authority. These verses look far into the future, assuring us that His holding of the office of High Priest is a settled, eternal issue.

Why? The answer appears in Hebrews 1:9: God places Him in that office, anointing Him "with the oil of gladness more than [His] companions," because He "loved righteousness and hated lawlessness," as demonstrated by His sinless life. He most certainly qualified for it. The quotation from Psalm

45:6-7 is no idle saying. Jesus was head and shoulders above all others in terms of His qualifications to lead.

These brief statements set the stage for the rest of the epistle. Hebrews 1 is a primer of what He has already done and will continue to do and expand upon for the members of the God Family. Remember, Christ Himself dogmatically states, “Without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). God is glorified by His Family producing fruit, and without Jesus Christ, no fruit can be produced. Without His work, our salvation would be impossible. As High Priest, He is the literal link between us and sharing eternity with God in His Family. Without Him, we could expect only death in the Lake of Fire.

His résumé, if you will, paves the way for chapter 2 to begin with a strong sense of urgency:

Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him. (Hebrews 2:1-3)

In this exhortation, the author urges us, considering Christ’s qualifications, not to let these truths go to waste by failing to take advantage of them. If we neglect them, we *will* lose our salvation. What chapter 1 says is that important!

Our Need for Divine Leadership

Chapter 2 follows through on the three offices He holds: King, Son, and High Priest. The author refers to Jesus as “Lord” in Hebrews 2:3 and speaks of Him “crowned with glory and honor” in verses 7 and 9. The Father puts all things under Him (verse 8). His position of Son—the first and greatest of many sons and daughters—is implied in the language of verses 10-13. Verses 14-18 shows Him as a merciful and faithful High Priest in service to God.

We should reflect deeply and personally about how events are progressing in the nations of Israel, especially what we are experiencing in our own nation where the culture makes its greatest impact on us. We have all heard or seen these tragic, violent, destructive events, either personally or via the news. Here in America, we once proudly called our country “the land of the free and the home of the brave,” but now, discontent and fear run high. The national culture is nowhere near as moral as when it was founded over two centuries ago. We need our Savior’s leadership.

In this atmosphere, we should consider the claims that the Father and Son and Their way of life—biblical Christianity—have on humanity. Today, numerous “Christians” shame Christianity, displaying before the world a confusing array of beliefs and practices, many of which do not adhere at all to the practices and teachings of Jesus Christ. They are most assuredly not following Him.

What follows are my summaries of lengthier remarks written by commentator Albert Barnes, which he inserted as a sort of bridge between chapters 1 and 2 in the *Barnes’ Notes on the New Testament* commentary on Hebrews. He seems to have been so moved by the implications of Hebrews 1 that he drew up a list of comments focusing on the remarkable state of humanity’s near non-response to its amazing truths and profound revelations about life and the future.

His remarks ask the overall question, “Do people feel no sense of obligation to God, Jesus Christ, and the Christian religion for the truths made so readily available to them?” We may have wondered this very thing ourselves. What does it take to impress people so they will seriously react and truly consider what God reveals?

Barnes uses the term *claim* in the sense of a “demand.” It takes the sense of an assertion of a right for something due in response to something freely given. In Romans 1:20, God, who cannot lie, dogmatically states mankind has no excuse before Him. Why? Because humanity has been shown conclusively that God exists, but it continues in its own way, ignoring Him.

Albert Barnes was an American clergyman, so he possesses an American viewpoint on how people of this nation respond to God, or more correctly, fail to do so. He put together some interesting thoughts. From my perspective, few in our country have genuinely believed God has a claim on our lives, even though He created us and provides for us.

Claim 1

This first claim is illustrated by God's dealing with Adam and Eve and their response. Biblical Christianity, the true way of life of the Father and Son, has a claim on humanity's attention and loyalty because humans are Their creation and the clear aim of Their concerns from beginning to end in Scripture. In fact, Their message is aimed directly at mankind, indicating that the Father and Son do not hide from humanity.

However, most people ignore Scripture's truths in terms of practical application in daily life. Even the Redeemer's Sermon on the Mount, though admired by many as wonderful advice, is not obeyed but ignored. How do we know this is true? Within His sermon, Jesus states that God has not done away with His law, but people ignore His words, doing what satisfies the demands of their desires. Instead, humans follow the pattern established by their original parents. At the beginning, Adam and Eve took of the Forbidden Tree despite God's warning, and most human beings have followed their examples.

Claim 2

By virtue of being divine and humankind's Creator, Jesus of Nazareth has His own individual claim. From beginning to end, we owe Him our lives, a fact that the Bible makes abundantly clear, so much that Barnes wondered why people even question it. That God sent Jesus Christ to speak to us of Him and of His purpose is a tremendous honor for mankind. Because One of such authority has spoken, what He said stakes a claim on our attention.

The things the Bible records Him doing in the presence sometimes of thousands are a telling witness. Yet, many treat those miraculous events like fairy tales. Such miracles are impossible for a created being like man. Can

any mere man quiet the roaring winds or calm the waves of a raging sea or heal a dying child from the distance of at least twenty miles just by saying a few words? Yet, if His miracles define the distinction humans make between a created man and Creator God, then men have little or no concept of what constitutes a divine being. What really separates God from man? The separation appears in God's awe-inspiring powers *combined with* the purity of His use of those powers.

Conclusion: Jesus was indeed divine, God in the flesh. Every action He takes is for our well-being. Humanity, though, still has little or no respect for His words or deeds.

Claim 3

Jesus Christ witnessed to the world of the Father and of God's purpose. When we combine John 1 with Hebrews 1, we see the evidence of Jesus' witness discloses the record of His divine glory, providing a manifestation that renders men without a valid excuse. These three witnesses—John 1, Hebrews 1, and the witness of Jesus Himself—reveal the glory of God.

An illustration from nature may help: By shining, the sun is revealed. Likewise, the Son of God displayed brilliance in His demeanor like the sun in all its glory, and it was recorded by far more witnesses than for any other ancient personality. In His witness, He made God known to mankind.

All of nature depends on the sun's light and radiation. In like manner, because of the light of Jesus' life and the warmth emanating from His message about His way of life, humankind is dependent even in its ignorance. He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). Psalm 84:11 reads, "For the LORD God is a sun and shield; the LORD will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from those who walk uprightly."

Conclusion: To those who consider carefully, His generosity in service to humanity is overwhelming.

Claim 4

Jesus made an atonement for sin that places a claim on human conduct. Hebrews 1:3 dogmatically informs us He atoned for sin by Himself. No animal was involved. No other man or angel did it. The bulk of educated humanity knows this truth but ignores what it means for the profitable use of a person's life. Most shrug off that His sacrifice opens the door to God's offer of salvation to those He calls. Though many may seem convicted of the fact of Jesus' sacrifice, they apparently have no faith that the authority of the Father guarantees the efficacy of His sacrifice.

Conclusion: Sin continues because most people fail to take Christ's sacrifice and its ramifications seriously.

Claim 5

Jesus has been exalted to sit at the Father's right side in heaven. By the power of the Father, He rose from the dead to work with the Father on Their plan to complete the creation of mankind in God's image. No plan of Theirs has ever failed by even the smallest degree. Yet few use their faith in Jesus' work. Most make no effort to seek His help in producing the fruit that glorifies God.

Conclusion: Humanity shows it cannot be bothered with such a triviality as prayer.

Claim 6

It is right for us to worship the Lord Jesus Christ. When He was born into the world as a human, the angels gave homage by worshipping Him. The wise men from the east who came to witness of His birth worshipped Him, and God did not rebuke them for doing so. These witnesses all worshipped Him even as a newborn, before He did anything that demonstrated His divinity. Therefore, He was always God, even within His mother's womb (see Luke 1: 39-45). He was not a mere angelic messenger. As the Living God, His every act was divine, and even as a human, He showed ample evidence of His authority.

Claim 7

Hebrews 1:8, supported by John 1:1-2, attests that it is right to address Jesus as God. We cannot go wrong if we address Him as such because the Bible, the sacred Scriptures, obviously does. In terms of character and purpose, He is exactly and precisely the perfect image of the One called “the Father.” They are distinct Personalities while identical in purpose and character. They are not divided, nor do They compete in any way.

Claim 8

In one sense, the Kingdom of God under King Jesus Christ already exists because those God has converted already have God’s Holy Spirit, making them the Kingdom’s citizens (Philippians 3:20). Thus, the converted begin to bear the Father and Son’s attitude and character image. Besides, Hebrews 1:8-9 reveals Him as already anointed and on its throne as King. He simply has not yet established His Kingdom on earth. It is devoted to righteousness, and its extant presence through the Holy Spirit bids us to join further with it. People move all over the world, seeking a better life, while they could experience the Kingdom of God spiritually right where they are.

Claim 9

What the world will soon face gives Christianity a vital position to claim mankind’s attention and service. Under God’s dominion, the earth and the life it bears have never stopped changing. For instance, God exhibited some of His mighty powers in the Noachian Flood, changing the entire world. Hebrews 1:10-12 combined with prophecies in the gospels and Revelation foretell in terrifying language that the earth and even the heavens will, at God’s direction, undergo tremendous changes as Christ’s return nears. Who can truly imagine what people will have to witness and endure before He completes this phase of His purpose? Christianity’s claim represents that safety is to be found at His side. Why not move to escape within God’s merciful claim on us?

Claim 10

Malachi 3:6 reads, “For I am the LORD, I do not change.” Hebrews 13:8 states, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” If the Kingdom

claims us as one of its own, God may require us to experience some dangerous, even life-ending, situations. Under humans, governments go through constant changes even during peacetime, and the process of change ramps up as enemies vie for control through warfare of some sort, including politics.

The Bible assures us, “There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother” (Proverbs 18:24). Our attachment to Jesus Christ—our Redeemer and Brother—must be unaffected by all external changes. In Him is safety. He is giving us the time we need to bind us to Him, but the dissolution of all things, though out of sight now, could soon come into view as our God moves toward the conclusion of His purpose.

Claim 11

The implications of Hebrews 1:14 should restore our confidence about man’s importance in God’s purposes. In God’s purpose for man, we witness man’s dignity—his worth or value—from God’s point of view. In His mind, man is worth so much that He has ordered angels to serve us. Depending on how much this world has influenced or jaded us, even this astounding revelation may not impress.

In this world, kings are served by a retinue of other, lesser men. However, in God’s purpose, angels—beings of far greater powers and intellect than mere men—attend His children. What does this revelation suggest about the elect’s value in our Creator’s mind? These highly gifted and mighty beings wait on even the humblest of converted humanity, people who may suffer a wasting disease or may not have completed even an elementary-school education, assisting them in entering God’s Kingdom. Their Creator has impressed upon them our importance to Him, so they serve us as though we are precious beyond all reason.

Claim 12

Christianity has a major claim on us in that we must seriously consider what God has done for humanity and especially for His elect at this time. In the first place, He has thoughtfully created man in His image. He designed and is carrying out a purpose for our salvation so we might live eternally in His

image and participate with Him in whatever He plans for the expansion of His Family Kingdom. He has provided a Savior and Redeemer to pay for our self-centered failures. He has shared His Spirit with us so we might have the powers we need to prepare for what He promises. He gives us an awareness of Him and His purposes to help us make the right choices. He has revealed His goals for our well-being so we might glorify Him by making the best use of our lives. God is rightfully challenging us within our abilities so that our choices agree with His plans. We just have to believe Him. How much evidence do we need?

Draw Near to God

Those claims should motivate us to think deeply. When we, as converted individuals, consider our obligations to God, we may think no further than the forgiveness of our sins through Christ's sacrifice. We must mull this obligation over extensively, but each of these claims still applies to us. The same God who makes these claims plucked us from the great mass of humanity and invited us to take part in His marvelous purpose. He has not done that for very many, has He? If He had not intervened in our lives, we would still be among those ignoring His claims.

The apostle Paul writes in Philippians 4:6, "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." He adds in I Thessalonians 5:17-18, "[P]ray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."

Herbert Armstrong mentioned during a sermon that he began each prayer by thanking God that He is God. Where he got the idea to begin his prayers in this way is a mystery, but it fits into the general flow of these claims. It opens a person's mind to being moved to thank God for what He has already provided for humanity's well-being. The list of God's works for us is endless.

To help supply us with subjects for which we can be thankful in prayer, here is a list of the twelve claims, each condensed into a few, more easily remembered statements:

1. Beginning with Adam and Eve, God reveals mankind to be His major concern, and His message is aimed directly at us. He does not hide from us.
2. Jesus of Nazareth is our literal Creator, and we owe our very being to Him.
3. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life we are to follow, and by His life, He modeled the glory of God's way of life.
4. Jesus by Himself paid the penalty for our sins, and in so doing, He opened the door for us to eternity in the Kingdom of God.
5. The Father raised Jesus from the dead, and He now sits in glory at the Father's right side on His throne in heaven.
6. Jesus has always been God, and even as a newborn, before He ever did anything, He was worshipped by those who came to visit.
7. Jesus and the Father are identical in character and purpose. They live without division and competition with each other.
8. God is forming His Kingdom as He and the Son create more children in the image of God. His converted children are already considered its citizens.
9. Terrifying events are prophesied to occur just before Christ's coming, and the safest place is within God's Family.
10. The Bible claims both the Father and the Son never change. So, as this world's systems disintegrate at Christ's return to rule the earth, closeness to Them represents real security.
11. God's children are of such importance to Him that He has assigned angels to watch over them.
12. God has designed Christianity to provide the structures, methods, and relationships for training us to be prepared to live in His Kingdom.

In Christian love,

