

Dr. Jack L. Arnold

Lesson 3
The Superiority of Christ to Angels
Hebrews 1:4-14

What do you think of Christ? Whose Son is He? Christians from the beginning have declared that Christ is the eternal Son of God, co-equal with the Father in nature, and that Jesus Christ lived, died, was resurrected and ascended to the right hand of the Father as the God-Man. Is it necessary to believe that Christ is the God-Man? What difference does it make if Christ is not truly God and truly man?

Perhaps Christ is merely the highest of all angels, or perhaps He is merely the first created being through whom everything else is created as the Jehovah Witnesses, Mormons and Unitarians declare. They claim that Jesus Christ is less than God but more than man, but He is not the Creator and God come in the flesh. Who is right? Our only standard for authority is the Holy Scripture. We, as Christians, must appeal to the Bible as our only rule of faith and practice, and the Book of Hebrews helps us solve the questions about Christ.

THE ARGUMENT OF THE BOOK

The Book of Hebrews was written to a group of professing Christians who were seriously considering leaving the Christian Faith to go back into Judaism. There were certain things in Judaism that were very attractive to them. The author of Hebrews throughout this epistle shows the superiority of Christ and the New Covenant to Moses and the Old Covenant. The author is constantly arguing for the superiority of Christ to anything and everything in Judaism.

Jewish theology gave a very high place to angels because they were associated with many of the main events in Israel's history. Angels were greatly exalted and given a high position in the Jewish mind. Angels in the Old Testament, at times, acted in a mediatorial capacity between God and man and this was especially true in the giving of the Law to Moses. The Mosaic Law was mediated from God to Moses through angels.

“And he said, ‘The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones (angels); at His right hand there was flashing lightening for them’” (Deut. 33:2).

“The chariots (angels) of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands; the LORD is among them as at Sinai, in holiness” (Psalm 68:17).

Why the Law then? It was added because of transgressions, having been ordained through angels by the agency of a mediator, until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made” (Galatians 3:19).

Christianity claims that Christ is the one mediator between God and man as to the obtaining of salvation. *“For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man*

Christ Jesus... (1Tim. 2:5). The Jewish mind would naturally think that a mere human, as Christ, even if He were the greatest of all humans, would not be as good a mediator as angels. They would reason that angels are mediators as well as Christ, so why do we need Christ to minister to us when we have angels?

The author, knowing the Jewish mind, begins in Hebrews 1:4-14 to analyze the person and work of angels and contrast them with the person and work of Christ to prove the inferiority of angels and the superiority of Christ.

THE PERSON OF CHRIST (1:4)

“having become as much better than the angels...” -- It is immediately declared that Christ is “better” than the angels. The text says that Christ was “made better” than the angels, but Christ cannot be made anything because He is the Creator; He is the Maker. This actually says Christ “became so much better than the angels.” As the eternal Son of God, Christ was always superior to the angels, but for a short period of time Christ took upon Himself a human nature, humbling himself as a man to go to the cross to die for sinful men. At one point in His humanity, due to His mediatorial office, Christ was made ***“for a little while lower than the angels, namely, Jesus, because of the suffering of death”*** (Heb. 2:9). However, at a point of time, Christ in His humanity was exalted above all the angels. What was this event? It was the resurrection and ascension of our Lord. As the God-Man, He received a glorified body and ascended to the throne at His Father’s right hand in heaven. Jesus Christ became King of all, including the angels.

“as He has inherited a more excellent name than they” -- Jesus Christ has inherited the Father’s domain because He is the ascended and exalted Son of God. The universe, which belongs to the Father, now belongs to the Son. Because of his inheritance, the Father has given Christ a more excellent name than any angel could ever have. A name not only denotes that by which one is called, but everything the name embraces; that is, rank, authority, excellence, fame and character. Christ’s person, character, fame and excellence transcend and eclipse that of the angels. He is above them in kind; He is above them in degree and rank. The name may be “Son of God” or it may be a name that only Christ Himself knows. ***“And His eyes are a flame of fire, and upon His head are many diadems; and He has a name written upon Him which no one knows except Himself”*** (Rev. 19:12).

Christ’s name bears the authority of God. Men can only be saved through the name of Christ. ***“And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men, by which we must be saved”*** (Acts 4:12). And one day all men in heaven and in hell will bow their knees to Christ’s name.

“Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9-11).

Angels cannot save sinners and any authority that angels have is delegated authority. Therefore,

Christ is superior to the angels.

THE PROOF FROM THE SCRIPTURE (1:5-14)

The author now seeks to prove the superiority of Christ to angels by quoting seven scriptures from the Old Testament. The Jew accepted the authority of the Bible and the author calmly and wisely uses the “scripture to show that Christ is better than the angels.

Notice carefully that the author does not turn to human reasoning or philosophy for his support, but only to the Word of God, the Holy Scriptures. The Bible is our only line of defense against anti-Christian thinking.

Christ’s Positional Dignity (1:5a)—“***For to which of the angels did He ever say, ‘THOU ART MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN THEE’?***”

This quote is from Psalm 2:7. This quote is used to prove that no angels individually have ever been called “my Son.” Angels are called the “Sons of God” in the Old Testament (Job 1:6), but this is only in a collective sense. Jesus Christ is “the Son of God,” the unique Son of God who is co-equal with the Father and the Holy Spirit in the Trinity. This declaration of son ship does not seem to refer to His eternal son ship or to the incarnation, but to the resurrection. This verse refers to the positional dignity the Son has because of His official son ship made possible by the resurrection.

“That God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, ‘THOU ARE MY SON; TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN THEE’ (Acts 13:33).

“Who was declared with power to be the Son of God by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord...” (Rom. 1:4).

The resurrection proved that Christ was truly the eternal Son of God. Christ, because of the resurrection, has a superior position over the angels.

Christ’s Continued Dignity (1:5b)—“***And again, ‘I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM, AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME.’***”

This quote is from 2 Sam. 7:14 which deals directly with King David, but the Holy Spirit applies this verse to Christ Himself. The Father has a unique relationship to the Son, and the dignity conferred upon Christ at the resurrection will continue forever.

Christ’s Future Dignity (1:6)—“***And when He again brings the first-born into the world, He says, ‘AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP HIM.’***”

This is a quote from Psalm 97:7b. Whatever else this verse may mean, it is quoted to prove that angels are commanded to worship the Son. Only God is worthy of any creature worship. Angels are but creatures and they are to worship Jesus Christ. Therefore, Christ is superior to the angels.

May I suggest to you that the final fulfillment of this verse will be at the second advent of Jesus Christ. This could be translated, “When he shall have brought in the firstborn into this world.” Both the Old Testament and the New Testament state that Christ will return to this world with his angels to execute judgment upon it. This will be a time when His dignity is finally realized by all, and the angels will worship Christ as the judge of heaven and earth.

“For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus” (2 Thess. 1:7-9).

The word “first-born” does not mean that Christ was the first created being, but it is a title to express priority to all creation and His sovereignty over all creation. John Bunyan said, “If Jesus Christ be not God, then heaven will be filled with idolaters.”

Christ’s Creatorship (1:7)—***“And of the angels He says, ‘WHO MAKES HIS ANGELS WINDS, AND HIS MINISTERS A FLAME OF FIRE.’”***

This is a quote from Psalm 104:4. Angels are “made” by Christ to be His ministers or servants. Christ has authority over angels because they do His bidding. Angels are servants. Christ is Creator with authority over angels and is thus superior to them.

Christ’s Ruler Ship (1:8-9)—***“But of the Son He says, ‘THY THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM. THOU HAS LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS; THEREFORE GOD, THY GOD, HATH ANOINTED THEE WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE THY COMPANIONS.’”***

This quote is from Psalm 45:7,8. Angels are but servants of Christ who rules over all. Christ, as God, rules over the angels. The Father says unto His Son, ***“Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever.”*** This is a clear reference to the deity of Christ. As God upon His throne, Christ rules over all in righteousness.

There is an immeasurable gulf, which separates between creature and Creator. The angels are but spirits, but Christ is God. Why do angels worship Christ? Because He is God come in the flesh!

Christ’s Unchangeableness (1:10-12)—***“And, ‘THOU, LORD, IN THE BEGINNING DIDST LAY THE FOUNDATION O THE EARTH, AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF THY HANDS; THEY WILL PERISH, BUT THOU REMAINEST; AND AS A MANTLE THOU WILT ROLL THEM UP; AS A GARMENT THEY WILL ALSO BE CHANGED. BUT THOU ARE THE SAME AND THEY YEARS WILL NOT COME TO AN END.’”***

This is a quote from Psalm 102:25-27. Jesus Christ, the Creator, has created the heavens and the

earth. These will all perish, but only Christ will remain continually. He is the Eternal One and unchangeable in His nature. All created things are growing old and are changing, but only Christ is unchangeable because He is God. ***“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today and, yes, for ever”*** (Heb. 13:8).

Many scoffers today, who are committed to uniformitarianism based on the premise of evolution, make fun of Christians. They say the world will always continue as it always has continued, but we know the world is growing older and wearing out. For you scientists in our midst, we have here stated in Scripture the Second Law of Thermodynamics which says, the whole universe is degenerating and wearing out. We are specifically told that scoffers will challenge God, the return of Christ, and all supernaturalism in the last days. ***“Know this first of all, that in the last days mockers will come with their mocking, following after their own lusts, and saying, ‘Where is the promise of His coming? For ever since the father fell asleep, all continues just as it was from the beginning of creation’*** (2 Peter 3:3-4). We Christians know the world will grow old, Christ will return and there will be new heavens and a new earth.

“Looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat. But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:12-13).

Everything else changes, but only Christ remains constant. Christ is unchangeable because He is God and, as God, He is superior to all angelic beings.

Christ’s Authority (1:13-14)—***“But to which of the angels has He ever said, ‘SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I MAKE THINE ENEMIES A FOOTSTOOL FOR THY FEET’?”***

This is a quote from Psalm 110:1. The Father told the Son to sit down on His throne. When He sat down on the throne, He was the Victor; and one day, at the Second Advent, all of Christ’s enemies will be defeated. Christ will be the final Victor.

Notice again that Christ has sat down, indicating that His work is finished, but the angels are continuing to minister to all who are truly saved. Each Christian has a guardian angel. Christ’s work is superior to the work of the angels because His work is finished and completed, but angels continue to minister to Christ’s servants by delegated authority.

Guardian angels do protect every true child of God. In 2 Kings 6:15-17, Elisha and his servant were menaced by the king of Syria. His forces were sent out to capture them. A host compassed the city where they were. The servant was terrified. Then the prophet prayed unto Lord to open his eyes, ***“and the LORD opened the servant’s eyes; and he saw; and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”*** These, we know, were the protecting angels of God who minister to those who are heirs of salvation. Yet, all the hosts of angels are inferior to the person of Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

Saved

When we read Hebrews 1 through carefully, we see that Christ is truly God and truly man. Marvelous titles are given to Christ. He is highly exalted and given a name above every name. The beauty of His person, the glory of His deity and the perfection of His humanity are set before us so vividly and clearly. We feel a sense of awe and worship and we fall down on our knees and adore Christ as King, Ruler, Creator, God, Lord and Master. Christ is not only superior to angels, He is superior to everything.

Christ is not our “buddy” or “the man upstairs” or “J.C. our friend,” but He is our Lord and God! We must never drag the precious name of our Savior down into the muck of commonness. Christ is the Lord of glory and we must see to it that He is given His rightful name from our lips and proper adoration from our hearts. A true worshipper of Christ is one who comes into His presence with reverence, respect and awe, for Christ alone is the Lord of glory.

Unsaved

These verses in Hebrews 1:4-14 tell us clearly that Christ is not the highest of all angels or the first created being, but that He is God, the second person of the Trinity. As the God-Man, He was able to secure a perfect salvation for all who trust Him as personal Savior and Lord. ***“And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.”*** (Heb. 5:9). All those who trust Christ become “heirs of salvation” because they share the inheritance and destiny of Jesus Christ. Do you see yourself a sinner, separated from God, under God’s wrath and headed for eternal judgment? If you do, that is good, but it is not enough to save you. You must now trust Christ and His death upon the cross for your sins, your alienation and your judgment. By faith, you must lay hold of Christ for salvation.

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” (Heb. 11:6).