GREATER THAN ANGELS HEBREWS 1



T. M. Moore A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Hebrews 1: Introduction

The first Christians endured persecution for their faith, especially those who came to Christ from the Hebrew communities of the Roman Empire. This persecution was not violent, but it was significant, and in many places, Hebrew believers began reverting to old ways and beliefs, in an effort to relieve the social pressure that was being exerted upon them by their families and friends.

Enter the writer of the book of Hebrews, determined to bolster the flagging faith of his fellow Christians, and to embolden them to stand firm against all opposition in their commitment to Christ.

The book of Hebrews was written to believing Jews in various places to remind them of the greatness of Jesus and the New Covenant He inaugurated. Chapter 1 begins this strong defense of the faith by showing that, according to Old Testament revelation, Jesus is greater than the angels, and since He is worshiped and served by angels, we must hold fast in worship and service to Him as well.

We're pleased to make this resource available for personal or group study at no charge, and we hope you will find this series helpful in realizing more of the presence, promise, and power of the Kingdom of God.

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1 The Last Word

Introduction

God's last Word to us is actually His first Word – His only-begotten Word and Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. All that we can know of God is revealed in His Word, and what we can know through Him is radiant and glorious and full of power and majesty and holiness. We must never lose sight of this Word, which is precisely what the first recipients of this epistle were beginning to do.

Read Psalm 45.

Read Hebrews 1.1-3.

Think it through.

1. Do you find it amazing, even astonishing, that God would speak at all to mere humans (v. 1)? Why or why not? What does it say about God that He does? How many different ways did God reveal Himself in the Old Testament? Now "in these last days", He "has spoken to us by *His* Son". Jesus said that all Scripture is about Him (Jn. 5.39). Give some examples to support that claim. God's Son is *Heir* and *Creator* of all things (v. 2). What does this suggest about the things God has entrusted to us (1 Cor. 4.7; Jms. 1.17)? Should knowing this affect the way we *use* those things? Explain.

2. Rephrase verse 3 by using the words *reveals, radiates, redeems,* and *rules* with respect to the Word and Son of God. Would this be important to include in sharing the Good News with someone? Explain. We note that the writer begins his book with a strong statement about God having revealed Himself in His Son. Meditate on Colossians 3.1-3. What did Paul want to guard us against? Why? The first readers of Hebrews were setting their minds more on the things of earth than what Paul commanded and the writer of Hebrews set before them. What happens when our focus turns from the things above to the things of earth? What can we do to keep our focus where it ought to be?

Meditate.

"The majesty of the Father is expressly imaged in the greatness of the power of the Son, that the one may be believed to be as great as the other is known to be. Again, as the radiance of light sheds its brilliance from the whole of the sun's disk ... so too all the glory which the Father has is shed from its whole by means of the brightness that comes from it, that is, by the true Light." *Gregory of Nyssa (335-394 AD)*

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. Colossians 2.8-10

Every day, Lord, the temptation is strong to lose sight of Jesus and to fix my hope on "things on the earth." Help me to see Jesus more clearly and consistently, Lord, seated at Your right hand and...

Pray Psalm 45.1-7

Pray these words slowly, savoring as you do the vision of Jesus, exalted in glory and majesty. Ask Him to be with you in glory and majesty throughout this day.

Psalm 45.1-7 (*Manoah: When All Your Mercies, O My God*) O my heart, let now a pleasing theme overflow to praise the Lord; My song I pledge to You, my King, and dedicate my words.

You of all men are the fairest, Lord, and Your lips are flush with grace; Thus God has blessed You evermore before His holy face.

Your sword gird on Your thigh, O Lord, in splendid majesty; Ride out, resplendent in Your Word, to glorious victory.

For meekness and for righteousness Your Right Hand shall prevail. Your foes shall come to deep distress when You their souls assail.

Your throne, O God, is evermore, and upright is Your reign; Though wicked men Your soul abhor, Your righteousness must gain.

2 Whom Angels Worship

Introduction

As we shall see, the first recipients of this epistle had begun to draw back from their former confidence in Christ. They were experiencing some push-back from their fellow Jews, and this led them to pull back from their bold and public commitment to the Lord. The writer of Hebrews was not content for this to happen, so he wrote to remind his readers of the excellence of Christ, and to encourage them to hold fast to their former confidence, firm to the end. He begins his argument by showing the superiority of Jesus over angels.

Meditate on Daniel 10.1-10; Psalm 97.1-9.

Read Hebrews 1.4-6.

Think it through.

1. Those first Christians who read the Old Testament understood that angels are powerful beings. As was the case with Daniel, people who encountered angels were awestruck and terrified. But angels, though powerful, do not compare with the greatness of our Lord Jesus Christ – either in majesty or might. Jesus "has obtained" a more excellent Name than Gabriel or Michael or any of the angels. What Name has Jesus obtained? How did He obtain that Name (cf. Rev. 5.11, 12)? Meditate on Philippians 2.9-11. What is the effect of His having obtained that Name?

2. How does the writer explain the Word's relationship to God the Father (v. 5)? What does God mean by the term "begotten" in verse 5? How does this compare with the phrase "brings the firstborn into the world" in verse 6? What does this tell us about the Word Who became flesh and dwelt among us (Jn. 1.14)? How do the angels now relate to this Word (v. 6; cf. Ps. 97.7 [gods refers to angels], Rev. 5.11-13)? Since angels worship the Word and Son of God, what's the message to the readers of Hebrews? Does it make sense to *leave off* worshipping this Word and Son? Why not?

Meditate.

"This is the way, dear friends, in which we found our salvation, Jesus Christ, the high priest of our offerings, the protector and helper of our weakness. Through him we fix our gaze on the heights of heaven. In him we see mirrored God's pure and transcendent face. Through him the eyes of our hearts have been opened. Through him our foolish and darkened understanding springs up to the light. Through him the Master has willed that we should taste immortal knowledge. For, since 'he reflects the glory of God,' 'he is as much superior to the angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs." *Clement of Rome (fl. 92-101 AD)*

Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice: "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain To receive power and riches and wisdom, And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" Revelation 5.11, 12

There is no name as great as Your Name, Lord Jesus Christ! And You have put Your Name upon me so that I...

Pray Psalm 45.10-15

The Church is the "daughter" mentioned here, who is called to worship her Lord and King. As you pray these verses, meditate on the *beauty* and *favor* of the Lord and the *gladness* and *rejoicing* of all who know Him.

Psalm 45.10-15 (*Manoah: When All Your Mercies, O My God*) Let none keep us from hearing You; desire our beauty, Lord! We bow, submitting humbly to Your ever-faithful Word.

The Church in robes of woven gold assembles to the King. With joy complete and gladness bold His praise she e'er shall sing.

3 Son King

Introduction

The writer of Hebrews will focus on Christ and His superiority to elements of religion that Jews in the first century looked to for security and a sense of wellbeing. The first readers of this epistle had come under persecution, and they were beginning to drift from trusting Christ alone. The writer insisted that nothing they could turn to apart from Jesus would provide them the hope, salvation, direction, and power they needed. The angels certainly understood this, and the first readers of Hebrews should follow their lead in holding fast to their confession of faith in Jesus Christ. In a time such as ours, when many distractions want to pull us away from complete trust in Jesus, we do well to heed this message.

Read Psalm 104.1-4.

Read Hebrews 1.7-9.

Think it through.

1. The writer introduces a topic which he will conclude at the end of this chapter (v. 14), namely, that the angels, powerful and terrifying as they are, perform the will of the Word of God on our behalf. We see this in the New Testament. How many different ways can you think of that angels do the Lord's bidding and serve His people in the New Testament? Angels do their work both seen and unseen, although they are not always recognized (Heb. 13.2). Should we *always* expect to see them as they serve us? Does this make their service any less valuable? Should we in some way acknowledge the work of angels on our behalf? But they are also "a flame of fire". Fire is used to represent at least two Biblical ideas – refinement and illumination. What does this suggest about the way angels serve us?

2. The writer gives us a lesson in how to read the Old Testament. Here (vv. 8, 9) is the first of several Old Testament texts which the writer will use to show the excellence of Jesus Christ (cf. Jn. 5.39). Look at Psalm 45.6, 7. Now read Psalm 45.1-5, 8, 9 and Revelation 6.1, 2. How does the writer want us to think about Jesus? The ruler's scepter is a symbol of his authority and realm. Jesus has a scepter of *uprightness* (not "righteousness" as in NKJV). Look at Ecclesiastes 7.29. What does this scepter suggest about the purpose of Christ's rule? What are the implications of His rule for you? Meditate on Romans 7.12 and Matthew 24.12. How does Jesus administer His Kingdom? We note also that Jesus' Kingdom is a Kingdom of gladness. Should we expect to know this gladness as we seek the Kingdom of Jesus? Explain.

Meditate.

"Your throne, O God, is forever.' Through this he teaches us that the phrase 'he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high' was meant in human fashion. As God he has a throne that is eternal and a kingdom that is without beginning or end, but here human things are associated with it." *Theodoret of Cyr (393-466 AD)*

Gird Your sword upon Your thigh, O Mighty One, With Your glory and Your majesty. And in Your majesty ride prosperously because of truth, humility, and righteousness; And Your right hand shall teach You awesome things. Psalm 45.3, 4

And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer. Revelation 6.2

You are riding forth today, O Lord, and we are they who bear You into the world, into our own Personal Mission Fields. God forth in and with me today, Lord, for...

Pray Psalm 45.1-7

As you pray, think about how Jesus wants to ride forth in you today, conquering and to conquer, and offer yourself for His glory and Kingdom.

Psalm 45.1-7 (*Manoah: When All Your Mercies, O My God*) O my heart, let now a pleasing theme overflow to praise the Lord; My song I pledge to You, my King, and dedicate my words.

You of all men are the fairest, Lord, and Your lips are flush with grace; Thus God has blessed You evermore before His holy face.

Your sword gird on Your thigh, O Lord, in splendid majesty; Ride out, resplendent in Your Word, to glorious victory.

For meekness and for righteousness Your Right Hand shall prevail. Your foes shall come to deep distress when You their souls assail.

Your throne, O God, is evermore, and upright is Your reign; Though wicked men Your soul abhor, Your righteousness must gain.

4 Eternal Creator and Lord

Introduction

The writer continues his appeal to the book of Psalms concerning the superiority of Jesus Christ over angels. Turning now to Psalm 102, he elaborates more fully on the sovereign rule of Jesus over all things. He made everything, He rules and keeps them, and He will renew His creation for eternity.

Read Psalm 102.16-27.

Read Hebrews 1.10-12.

Think it through.

1. The "And" of verse 10 refers back to verse 8 and indicates that the One being spoken of in Psalm 102.25-27 is the Son. Here He is portrayed as the Creator of heaven and earth, as in John 1.1-3. The Word Who became flesh in Jesus, and Who has ascended to heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father, is the Creator and Upholder of all things (cf. Heb. 1.3). How should keeping this in mind embolden our faith? Why should we hold fast our trust in Him, rather than in temporal things and conditions (v. 11)? When we are tempted to shift our trust from our eternal Creator and Lord to temporal things or conditions, what should we do?

2. What is implied in the phrase, "Like a cloak You will fold them up"? How will the heavens and earth "be changed"? When? And when they are changed, Who will accomplish these changes? What does this suggest about the nature of those changes? Note the mention of Christ's *un*changeableness in verse 12 (cf. Heb. 13.8) and eternality (cf. Heb. 7.14-16). How do these compare with those traditions and practices these Hebrew Christians were beginning to revert to in their day? How should knowing this encourage us, when we are tempted to seek comfort, security, or happiness in temporal things or conditions? How can Christians help one another to keep their focus on and trust in Christ alone?

Meditate.

"He indicated creation's change for the better that was due to him, and his own lack of beginning or extinction. You are the same, and your years will never end,' he says, note, meaning, 'You were not made, but you are, and you admit of no change, being always the same.' This suggests also the impassibility of the divinity. If it suffered, how is it the same? After all, it would be changed, and if it passed three days in death, its years would fail. Both the prophet and the apostle, however, the one writing the testimony and the other using it, emphasize that he is always the same and his years will not fail." *Theodoret of Cyr (393-466 AD)*

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. John 1.1-3

What power You possess, O Lord Jesus! Power to create all things, power to sustain all things, power to make all things new, and power to enable me to...

Pray Psalm 45.6-12.

Ask the Lord to help you love righteousness and hate wickedness, and to love Him more than anyone or anything else.

Psalm 45.1-7 (*Manoah: When All Your Mercies, O My God*) Your throne, O God, is evermore, and upright is Your reign; Though wicked men Your soul abhor, Your righteousness must gain.

Your God has thus anointed You with oil of gladness great. Your robes are rich with rich perfume; sweet music gilds Your way.

In gold the queen at Your right hand, with princesses around, Resplendent with You takes her stand while glories great abound.

Let none keep us from hearing You; desire our beauty, Lord! We bow, submitting humbly to Your ever-faithful Word.

5 Enthroned!

Introduction

Only the Word of God – only Jesus – rules at the Father's right hand, wielding all authority in heaven and on earth, to build His Church and advance His Kingdom. And we are seated there with Him.

Read Psalm 110.

Read Hebrews 1.13

Think it through.

1. Meditate on John 13.3 and Matthew 28.18. What does this mean? What kind of authority is this? How does this authority relate to what we read in Hebrews 1.3? Were the Hebrew Christians to whom this book was addressed flowing *with* that authority or drifting out from under it? Explain. What about you? How would you be able to tell when you were drifting away from this authority? What should you do then?

2. Meditate on Ephesians 2.6. In what sense are we seated with Christ in the heavenly places? What kind of perspective on our lives and times does that provide? How does being seated here obligate us? How is God the Father putting Christ's enemies under His feet? Do we have a role in this?

Meditate.

"He is truly omnipotent and merciful who blessed what was damned, restored what was lost, freed what was subject, rendered our miseries strangers to us, and through his death made it possible for humanity to live, an immortal creature, which the devil had caused to die." *Cassiodorus (485-580 AD)*

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. Ephesians 2.4-7

O Lord Jesus Christ, enthroned in glory, grant me today by Your authority, power to...

Pray Psalm 45.1-7

Pray that, as Jesus goes forth in power, to build His Church and advance His Kingdom, you might go with Him, in meekness, righteousness, and truth..

Psalm 45.1-7 (Manoah: When All Your Mercies, O My God)

O my heart, let now a pleasing theme overflow to praise the Lord; My song I pledge to You, my King, and dedicate my words.

You of all men are the fairest, Lord, and Your lips are flush with grace; Thus God has blessed You evermore before His holy face.

Your sword gird on Your thigh, O Lord, in splendid majesty; Ride out, resplendent in Your Word, to glorious victory.

For meekness and for righteousness Your Right Hand shall prevail. Your foes shall come to deep distress when You their souls assail.

Your throne, O God, is evermore, and upright is Your reign;

Though wicked men Your soul abhor, Your righteousness must gain.

6 Our Ministers

Introduction

The writer of Hebrews intends to exalt Christ, not to diminish the work of angels. So, while he has been at pains to magnify the greatness of Christ as Creator, Sovereign, and Lord, he wants to make sure to give angels their due, and he returns to a subject he broached in verse 7, and which we will consider more closely here.

Meditate on Psalm 35.1-10; 91.9-16

Read Hebrews 1.14.

Think it through.

1. The word "ministering" here means to perform regular service. Angels are spiritual beings who perform regular service for us in a variety of ways. What do Psalms 35 and 91 suggest about that service? We know that angels served at the time of Christ's birth. In what ways? Meditate on Matthew 18.10. What does this indicate? Look at each of the following: Acts 12.5-11; Revelation 10.1-10; and Revelation 14.6, 7. What do these passages suggest about how angels serve believers?

2. The ministry of angels is in many ways a mystery. For the most part, they do their work as "spirits". But, according to Hebrews 13.2, that is not always the case. Explain. Who are "strangers"? Can you think of any reason angels might take such a form? We do not pray to angels; indeed, for the most part, we are unaware of their ministries to us. But should we acknowledge them in some way? Can we learn anything about our own work of ministry (Eph. 4.11, 12) from meditating on the ministering work of angels?

Meditate.

"See how he lifts up their minds and shows the great honor that God has for us, since he has assigned to angels who are above us this ministration on our behalf. As if, one should say, for this purpose he says he employs them; this is the office of angels, to minister to God for our salvation. So that it is an angelic work to do all for the salvation of the brethren; or rather it is the work of Christ himself, for he indeed saves as Lord, but they as servants. And we, though servants, are yet angels' fellow servants." *John Chrysostom (344-407 AD)*

Then the devil left Him, and behold, angels came and ministered to Him. Matthew 4.11

Thank You, Lord, for the angels who will minister to me today. May I be like them in serving others, so that...

Pray Psalm 45.10-17.

If the *daughter* here is the Church, the attending virgins may well be angels. According to verse 17, what is their service – and ours – intended to achieve?

Psalm 45.10-17 (Manoah: When All Your Mercies, O My God)

Let none keep us from hearing You; desire our beauty, Lord! We bow, submitting humbly to Your ever-faithful Word.

The Church in robes of woven gold assembles to the King. With joy complete and gladness bold His praise she e'er shall sing.

When we at last Your palace gain, and others take our place,

Then let our children with You reign, a legacy of grace!

7 Greater than Angels

Introduction

There can be no mistaking the theme of the book of Hebrews: Jesus is the Greatest! Whatever those first readers (Hebrew Christians) were thinking about turning to other than Jesus was, the writer will demonstrate, a serious mistake. Nothing in this world is greater than angels. Every Hebrew knew that. And Jesus is greater than angels.

Read Philippians 2.5-11 and Ephesians 1.15-23.

Read and Meditate on Hebrews 1.

Think it through.

1. Let's keep in mind that the writer of Hebrews was trying to arrest his readers' drift (Heb. 2.1) *from* Christ *to* something else – something that was less of a lightning rod for the hostility of their fellow Jews. Why would he begin his letter with a discussion of angels? If he were to write that letter to Christians today, in our Western world, where do you suppose he would begin? With angels? Or with something more mundane? Explain.

2. How does the writer depict the greatness of Jesus in chapter 1? In how many different ways (vv. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 13)? Is this the way you think about Jesus? Suppose a non-believing friend should ask you, "What's so great about Jesus, anyway?" What would you say?

Meditate.

"Leaving aside all the rest of creation he speaks about that which is higher than the rest of creation, namely, the angels. For if the Son differed from the angels in that they were created but he was not, how much more does he differ from all invisible things? And one must demonstrate in addition that he revealed through the statement 'but you are the same' Christ's eternal existence and the immutability of his nature. Through the phrase 'Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve' he shows that the Son is not a servant, but a fellow worker with God." *Severian of Gabala (fl. ca. 400 AD)*

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 1.22, 23

Thank You, Lord Jesus, that You are with me where I am, and I am with You where You are. Let me not drift from You, O Lord, You Who are superior to everything, but help me always to...

Psalm 45.1-17.

As you pray, let this psalm shape your vision of Christ exalted, of Him going forth conquering to conquer, and of you seeking His Kingdom and righteousness in all things.

Psalm 45.1-17 (Manoah: When All Your Mercies, O My God)

O my heart, let now a pleasing theme overflow to praise the Lord; My song I pledge to You, my King, and dedicate my words.

You of all men are the fairest, Lord, and Your lips are flush with grace; Thus God has blessed You evermore before His holy face.

Your sword gird on Your thigh, O Lord, in splendid majesty; Ride out, resplendent in Your Word, to glorious victory.

For meekness and for righteousness Your Right Hand shall prevail. Your foes shall come to deep distress when You their souls assail.

Your throne, O God, is evermore, and upright is Your reign; Though wicked men Your soul abhor, Your righteousness must gain.

Your God has thus anointed You with oil of gladness great. Your robes are rich with rich perfume; sweet music gilds Your way.

In gold the queen at Your right hand, with princesses around, Resplendent with You takes her stand while glories great abound.

Let none keep us from hearing You; desire our beauty, Lord! We bow, submitting humbly to Your ever-faithful Word.

The Church in robes of woven gold assembles to the King. With joy complete and gladness bold His praise she e'er shall sing.

When we at last Your palace gain, and others take our place, Then let our children with You reign, a legacy of grace!

Questions for Reflection or Discussion

- 1. Do we as believers have a responsibility to our fellow believers, to help them stay firm in the faith? Explain.
- 2. What are some things today that can cause Christians to drift from faith in Jesus Christ?
- 3. What are some ways we as Christians can remind ourselves and one another of the greatness of Jesus Christ? Why should we do this?
- 4. Do you think your reading and study of Hebrews 1 will affect the way you read the Old Testament from now on? Explain.
- 5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your life?

For prayer:

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Thank you.