

The Epistle to the Hebrews

Chapter 1

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds; Who being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high; Being made so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

For unto which of the angels said He at any time, 'Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee'? And again, 'I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son'? And again, when He bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, He saith, 'And let all the angels of God worship Him.' And of the angels He saith, 'Who maketh His angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.

But unto the Son He saith, 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.' And, 'Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands. They shall perish, but thou remainest. And they all shall wax old as doth a garment, and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.'

But to which of the angels said he at any time, 'Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool'? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?

Commentary

{1-2} – God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds.

I prefer to read these two verses as one. They were originally a single sentence from the author's pen and I don't care for the verse division mid-thought. This wonderful letter begins with a declaration of Christ's supremacy over all other prophets. Where they may have spoken God's words, they were still servants. But, Jesus held the unique position of Sonship. And, the author wastes no time in declaring that Jesus is the heir and creator of all things.

That's a pretty jarring opening statement to someone who was raised in the Hebrew tradition. Their earliest Scripture declared that God (*Elohiym*) made the heavens and earth. They all knew that Jehovah had said, "*Let there be light*". But, the author declares that it was Christ who did the speaking. The opening words of the *Hebrews* letter draw a direct line from Genesis 1, when God created all things; to John 1, where we are introduced to the Logos, or speaking agency of God's creative work; to Hebrews 1:1, where we see the magnificent condescension of God from His singular and self-sufficient glory down to the small, blue planet and finally down to individual men.

Throughout Israel's history, their communications from God came through their prophets, who spoke on God's behalf. But the words they spoke were not their own. They spoke words that were given to them - placed in their mouths, so to speak. Finally, however, the very authority from Heaven that spoke the words, "*Let there be light*" and it was so, came down among us and spoke His own words. And, to complete the picture, He not only spoke those words, He was the living, incarnate Word.

That very God - the Word made flesh - left His throne room in glory and stooped down to speak to miserable, lost sinners.... like you and me.

Now, to jump right into a bit of theology, it's worth pointing out that the "*last days*" reference does not appear to be an eschatological reference. In other words, the subject here is not about "end time" things.

The "*last days*" reference in verse 2 is a contrast to the phrase "*at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past*" in verse 1. In the past God spoke by one means, but in these more recent days (the end of the "speaking by prophets" days), He spoke by His Son.

The Son, meanwhile, is appointed heir of all things by virtue of the fact that He created all things. The apostle Paul expressed this idea several times. For instance –

“In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins; who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature. For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; all things were created by him, and for him, and he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And, he is the head of the body, the church; who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence, for it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell.” (Colossians 1:14-19)

“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11)

So, this letter begins with the startling declaration that the very Voice of God who spoke all things into existence has reached out of eternity into time and inhabited the person of Jesus Christ. That Voice is the final authority speaking the very words of God. The time of the prophets speaking to the people on God's behalf has passed and the final Word on spiritual life and our heavenly destiny has been spoken. He began all things and is heir of all things.

In short, the Son of God has spoken and His words are final. "*...This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him.*" (Mat. 17:5)

{3} - Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

From the earliest Hebrew Scriptures, God had been practically hidden, speaking only to select prophets and appearing only occasionally - as often as not, in judgment. He was not to be approached by the common people.

When God was approached there were definite rules and criteria that had to be met – only once a year, only by the High Priest, only with a blood sacrifice, only in accordance with the covenant rules.

But, through Christ we see God "unfolded," exegeted, perfectly expressed and approachable by the lowliest of men. The unapproachable God of Mt. Sinai came from behind the veil and everything we need to know of God, everything we long to see of His person and character, everything we could hope of His charity and grace, are present in this man, Jesus. He is all we need to approach God without fear, knowing we'll be accepted in Him - being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person. John's gospel reflects this same idea –

“Philip saith unto Him, Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Show us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwelleth in me. He doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me; or else believe me for the very works' sake.” (John 14:8-11)

“...and upholding all things by the word of his power...”

With God, words are things. Whatever He speaks - IS. It IS on the basis of the power and authority of the One who speaks. From nothing came everything. All things continue to exist based on the unchangeable authority of the Word which declared them to be so.

"The voice of the LORD is powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty." (Psalm 29:4)

This power is the very foundation of our faith. Just as God spoke light into the cosmos, He also speaks light into darkened men. And, the power of that Word makes it so. He spoke the stars into the Heavens, and speaks salvation into our hearts.

"So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God."
(Rom.10:17)

By the way, I like the "all things." I know myself well enough to know that I'll mess this thing up, given half a chance. But, it's not my failing grip on Him that is my confidence. It is His un-failing grip on me that assures me - "upholding all things by the word of His power." And, I'm in the "all things." And, so are you. Thank God.

"...when he had by himself purged our sins..."

I went to a church recently where a lady stood up and announced, "Jesus has done all He can do, now it's up to you to make up your mind to come to Him." What a pathetic Jesus they worship - one after their own imagination, and not the One who is revealed in Scripture. This verse says, by himself!!! Jesus didn't need my help and I wasn't there to help Him. Even the ones who were there abandoned Him. I can't pretend I'd do any better.

Christ was alone on the cross. He bore the weight of God's wrath - alone. He rose from the dead without anyone's choice or decision in the matter, and certainly none of us helped Him get up. He ascended into Glory to present the sufficient sacrifice, securing the eternal future of His people, and He did it without anyone's help or intervention. The glorious truth of His humility and His sovereignty is that He "purged our sins", cleaned up our bloody mess, and accomplished our redemption - alone.

But, wait - it gets better!

“(he) sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.”

It worked! He did it alone, and God accepted it! The price is paid! The atonement is complete! He accomplished everything He came here to accomplish, and God was so pleased with it, He gave Jesus the seat of greatest honor - at His right hand.

Hebrews 1:3 is one of those "key verses" that encapsulates the very crux and core of Biblical soteriology (the doctrine of salvation).

Here is a vital theological concept, the misapprehension of which has caused confusion in the church and led to multiple errors in modern Christian dogma. Pay attention, this is important –

Salvation occurred and was secured completely outside of every individual saved person.

Our justification before God was accomplished in a way completely external to ourselves. Christ, by Himself, secured the eternal future of His people when He paid their penalty on Calvary. There is nothing within us – not our profession of faith, not our church affiliation, not our baptism, not our good works, absolutely nothing – that completes or ratifies the work of Christ. He fully accomplished the redemption of His people, totally removing their sin and closing the breach between man and God.

He did it by Himself 2,000 years ago.

He did it, God accepted it, and it's finished.

Remember that.

So, let's recap. So far, Hebrews 1:1-3 has taught us:

- a) **God** - who was originally alone, self-sufficient, the only being whose purpose for existence is found completely within Himself - **spoke His words to prophets**. They, in turn, told those words to God's people.
- b) **He now speaks to us by His Son - alone**. The Son has the words of God and with His arrival on the stage of history, the prophetic speech, which led up to Him, has ceased. He, alone, has the authority to speak for God.
- c) **Christ, alone, was appointed by God as heir of all things**. He, alone, will occupy the judgment throne and He, alone, will bring His people to glory.
- d) **He, alone, made the worlds and all that is in them**. *"Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding!"* (Job 38:4)
- e) **Christ, alone, is the express image of God in human form**. He is unique. The only begotten of the Father.
- f) **He, alone, upholds all things by His power**. No one else could say such a thing. I can't even guarantee my next breath. But, He keeps the universe intact by the power of His decreed Word.
- g) **And, He - yep, alone - purged our sin**. He paid the price. He accomplished our salvation. He swept the floor clean. He took our debt and gave us His righteousness. He, alone, had a righteousness that was acceptable. And He, alone, bore the punishment and died the death our sin demanded.
- h) **He, alone and lifted up, sits on the right hand of the Father**. He, alone, is to be praised as the Majesty on high. He, alone, is to be counted worthy of worship and glorified as the God who became man.

Only a God as infinitely gracious and eternally loving as our God would have conceived such a thing. Christ came to reveal the essence and glory of God to us. In so doing, He took it upon Himself to do for us what we could not do. The Very Word by whom all things exist and consist bore the brunt of God's righteous anger, put away our sin and became the surety of our eternal redemption.

Have you ever heard such good news? And, we're just getting started!

{4} ~ Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

We live, sadly, in a time when the most common substitute for Christian worship is a form of new-age "spirituality" that worships and venerates angels. "Angelology" runs rampant. On the daytime talk shows I've seen panelists who insist that they can command angels to do their bidding, instructing them to heal or intervene in the events of life. A friend of mine who runs a retail "Crafts" store said that the simplest way to move any product off the shelves is "to put an angel on them." Books have been written by no less than Billy Graham (*God's Secret Agents*), and angels are touted in such books as *Embraced by the Light* by Betty Edie as the emissaries of God's love, bridging the gulf between life and death. A quick search on the Internet of the word "angels" got over 39,000 references. Angels are hot, hip, and what's happenin'.

Still, there's "*no new thing under the sun.*" False worship has been around ever since Satan aspired to the throne of God. Unfortunately, the mad rush to worship and glorify angels comes at the expense of sound Christian doctrine. In most cases, as in New Age writings, Christ is reduced to merely one of the pantheon of characters who have visited earth. Or, He is left out altogether.

But, at *Hebrews 1:4* the writer starts putting angels in their proper place. He does it by reaching back into the *Psalms* and reclaiming verses that his Hebrew audience would be familiar with. It's a perfect tutorial for learning how to "see Christ" in the Old Testament.

The first thing the author points out is that Christ obtained "a more excellent name" than the angels. The term "*name*" denotes authority. For instance, when the cops show up at our door and proclaim, "Open up in the name of the law", there is no definite "name" (like Bob or Doug) attached to that authority. The law itself is the authority. But, the representative of the law, the cop, declares his right to enter based on the "name of the law." Again, "name" denotes authority.

Likewise, Christ is given a better name - a higher authority and superior rank - than the angels. *Philippians 2:9* tells us –

“Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in Heaven {including angels}, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

{5a} – For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?

This is a reference to *Psalm 2:7-8*:

“I will declare the decree; the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen

for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.”

This prophetic promise is clearly a reference to Christ, so the author of *Hebrews* places a clear contrast between the Son and the angels. No angel ever received such a promise.

{5b} – And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?

This may well be a reference to Psalm 89:26-29 (I've included the entire passage because it's such a wonderful promise):

“He shall cry unto me, Thou art my father, my God, and the rock of my salvation. Also I will make Him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. My mercy will I keep for Him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with Him. His seed also will I make to endure forever, and his throne as the days of Heaven.”

Again, no angel was ever the recipient of such language.

{6} – And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.

Psalm 97:6-7 declares:

“The heavens declare His righteousness, and all the people see His glory. Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols; worship Him, all ye gods!”

The small “g” in “gods” denotes the principalities and powers of the heavenly realm. That includes angels. The angels are commanded of God to worship Christ. So, having demonstrated from Scripture the subordination of angels to Christ, the author turns his attention to what station angels actually possess in the hierarchy of Heaven.

{7} – And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.

That's an exact quote from Psalm 104:4. The point is that angels were created for the purpose of ministering. In fact, in Matt. 4:11 we find angels ministering to

Christ. They are not to be worshipped or adored. In Revelation 19:10 John fell at the feet of an angel to worship him, but the angel wisely corrected,

“See thou do it not; I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus; worship God.”

The contrast continues –

{8-9} - But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

Again, a quote from the Psalms. This time it's 45:6-7. The Son, significantly, is referred to as God, and the throne of His dominion is everlasting. He will rule in rightness. That will be the hallmark of His reign. The Son so loves the righteousness of God and hates iniquity that He endured the cross and bore the reproach of men to satisfy the righteous command of the Father. No angel (and no man) has ever loved the righteous decrees of God to such an extent. *"Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin"* (Heb. 12:4).

The result is that God has anointed the Son with great joy and exceeding gladness. Have you thought about that? Jesus is happy! God is happy with the Son and the Son is filled with Godly joy. And, it's a greater joy than any other being has ever known. Fortunately, it's a joy we will share with Him.

Psalm 5:11 “But let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice; let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them; let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee.”

{10-12} - And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands. They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.

This is a quote from Psalm 102: 25-27. The author already declared that Christ made the physical universe back in verse 2. But, now he adds a new wrinkle.

They are not eternal. They are temporal. And just as easily as He made all things, He will tuck them away and start again. However, the important element in the equation is *Himself*. He is unchanging, never-ending, constant, consistent, faithful, and eternally trustworthy.

That, by the way, is why we are eternally secure. Everything changes... except Him.

{13} – But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?

That's from Psalm 110:1. The answer? To none of them, thank you.

Christ, alone, will rule and reign. Christ vanquished His (and our) enemies - death, hell and the grave - at Calvary. Satan will be utterly defeated, sin will be completely abolished, iniquity will be eternally forgotten...and the Lord will rest his feet.

But, here's the topper:

{14} – “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?”

The writer brings angels all the way down to the position of servants to the heirs. Who are the heirs of salvation? Well... we are! Joint-heirs with Christ! (Rom.8:17). And, the angels are sent to minister to us! We are not to lift angels up as objects of worshipped - just the opposite! They were created for the purpose of service and ministry both to Christ and to those who belong to Christ.

"Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life?" (1stCorinthians 6:3)

At the risk of being redundant, let's review. This section of Hebrews begins a series of declarations that will prove conclusively from Old Testament Scripture that Christ is superior in every aspect of His life, ministry, station, and stature. And, in order to see Christ clearly, the first tradition of men that must be done away with is the notion that heavenly or spiritual beings are to be loved or venerated simply by virtue of being spiritual in nature. Fallen angels are able to portray themselves as "*angels of light*" (2ndCor.11:14) and the danger of this rampant angel adoration is the lack of discernment it maintains. The only safe ground is to worship the only trustworthy One, and Him alone.

It's commanded.

It's sensible.

He deserves it.

And, He is the only One of whom that can be said.