

# Look at the one greater than the angels

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[ 0 : 00 ]     Hebrews chapter 1, and we'll read the full of chapter 1, verses 1 to 14. In the past, God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways.

But in these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, and through whom also He made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and exact representation of His being, sustaining all things by His powerful Word. After He had provided purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the majesty in heaven, so He became as much superior to the angels as the name He has inherited is superior to theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, You are my son, today I become your father. Or again, I will be His father and He will be my son. And again, when God brings His firstborn into the world, He says, Let all God's angels worship Him. In speaking of the angels, He says, He makes His angels spirits and His servants flames of fire. But about the Son, He says, Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever. A scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore,

God, your God, has set you above your companions by appointing you with the oil of joy. He also says, In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain. They will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe, like a garment. They will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end. To which of the angels did God ever say, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet? Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation? Amen.

Well, I don't know if you've noticed, but it is coming up to Christmastime. One of my favorite features of the familiar story of Jesus' birth is the role that's played in that narrative by the angels. That the general position of angels as God's messengers comes to the fore in this narrative as they tell Zechariah and Mary and then the shepherds tell them what to expect. Luke chapter 2 verse 8, there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David, a Savior has been born to you. He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests. This choir of angels is a highlight of the role of angels as they glorify God because salvation is at hand, because God's favor rests upon his people. I wonder if you can imagine some of what that would have been like. Because remember, angels aren't, you know, the blonde-haired six-year-old girl in the white dress with the sparkly wings. This isn't your cute, cuddly nativity play, is it? No, this is a company of the heavenly host. That's host as in vast army. Every time an angel appears, the first thing they have to say is, Do not be afraid. It's not a cute little cuddly child. The overwhelming power of this experience, a couple of hundred heavenly soldiers belting out a song, a couple of thousand, a great company, a multitude, a throng, a crowd. It must have been quite the experience for those shepherds, mustn't it? You could dine out for months on a story like that. Just picture those shepherds rushing home to tell their families, You'll never guess what happened last night. It could easily be the most exciting, the most overwhelming event in somebody's life, couldn't it? Angels are impressive. A whole throng of them singing, surely a transformative experience. But think for a moment. What would have actually happened if they had rushed home to tell their families at that point? Well, they'd have been ignoring what the angels actually said, wouldn't they? The choir of angels is not the point.

And happily, the shepherds don't just head home. Verse 15 records, when the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about. So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph and the baby who was lying in the manger. So these angels were profoundly impressive, weren't they? This vast company of the heavenly host. But they pointed beyond themselves, pointed to something far greater.

[ 5 : 35 ] To someone far greater. Angels have been an ongoing source of fascination for people through the ages. Though often, I think, without much understanding of what they're really like. Even if you go back to old paintings, the way that angels are depicted there, you know, it's not just a modern thing that the angels are kind of cute and fluffy and cuddly versus the description in the Bible. Without much understanding of what they're like, what tasks they do or don't perform. Now, maybe it would be appropriate at some point to spend a bit of time studying and digging in to find out more about angels. But certainly, it wouldn't be appropriate to do that to the point of considering the angels as though they were an end in themselves. As though the angels were where we ought to be focused. And it seems like there was a danger of this kind of misplaced focus in the context to which this letter to the Hebrews was written. Maybe it is that there were people there who recognized that you need a mediator.

You need someone to bridge the gap between God and man. People there who acknowledge, well, Jesus had to be more than just a good man. He had to be more than the mediators they'd known in the past. Moses, the prophets, the priests, they weren't quite enough. They need more than that. But yet, it seems like there were people who couldn't quite bring themselves to go all the way, as it were, to acknowledge Jesus' divinity.

Seems likely there was a theory going around that Jesus is one of the angels. Someone more than human, but less than divine. Created perhaps to be the greatest of the angels for this special assignment in the human realm. I mean, that's plausible, isn't it? To have a great, impressive angel sent on this mission. And so the writer to the Hebrews sets out to correct this potential misunderstanding.

Sets out to show the true relationship between the Son and the angels. And in so doing, in setting out this relationship, he provides a compelling demonstration that Jesus, in fact, partakes of a number of divine attributes. Jesus truly is God. He shares in God's eternity, omnipotent power, fitness to be worshipped.

So the presenting comparison is between Jesus and the angels. But along the way, we have this portrait painted that will encourage us again to fix our eyes on Jesus in all his glory. And I hope will encourage us to do that, whether or not we've ever been tempted to view him as one of the angels.

[ 8 : 19 ] The sequence in these verses from 4 through to 14, the sequence of Old Testament quotations, they're structured as three pairs and then one alone at the end. So first pair, we see the one true Son, then there's a pair that describes the relationship between the Son and the angels particularly.

Third pair focuses on the Son's eternal nature. And then the concluding quotation, the Son's supreme authority. The one true Son, his relationship with the angels, his eternal nature, and his supreme authority. So the one true Son, verse 5, for to which of the angels did God ever say, you are my Son, and today I have become your Father. Or again, I will be his Father and he will be my Son.

This first quotation comes from Psalm 2, verse 7, that we concluded our singing with a few minutes ago. Now there was debate amongst the rabbis about who this Psalm was talking about, whether it's talking about maybe Aaron, David, the people of Israel as a whole referred to as God's Son.

None of those options are ridiculous, but the writer to the Hebrews is clearly understanding this Psalm, as many of his contemporaries did, clearly understanding it as referring to the Messiah himself, to the promised coming Savior. The total defeat of enemies that Psalm 2 sets out, and the appropriateness of bowing in homage to this Son, all of this only properly applies to God's own Messiah. So when the writer asks in verse 5, to which of the angels did God ever say, clearly the implied answer is none of them. God did not appoint any angel as Son. There are times in the Old Testament where angels are referred to as sons of God. And yet, it is only fully realized this designation was never fully applicable in any of those cases. The whole weight of this declaration, you are my Son, could never be born by any of the angels any more than any of the human beings that it's applied to in the

Old Testament. Could never be born by anyone until now. Until now, at Jesus' baptism and again at his transfiguration, God declares, you are my Son whom I love. Only then is this fully true.

[ 11 : 00 ] Now, don't be thrown in these verses by the language of, today I have become your Father, today I have begotten you. As though there were a time when God the Father and God the Son did not exist in that relationship. No, Paul, preaching in Pisidian Antioch, he has recorded in Acts 13, Paul declared, we tell you the good news, what God promised our ancestors. He has fulfilled for us their children by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm, you are my Son, today I have become your Father. Notice how Paul says that this is fulfilled. He says it is by raising up Jesus, it is by his resurrection that this good news of being the Son is fulfilled. In other words, the idea here of begetting, of becoming Father, the sense here is of declaring, of manifesting to the full.

Similarly, Romans chapter 1, Paul asserts, Jesus was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead. It is a declaration of what is already true. Jesus is the one true Son of the Father. Second quotation here in Hebrews is similar, this time from 2 Samuel. God explaining to David, David's not going to be the one to build a permanent temple for him. That will be the role of his offspring, whom God will raise up to succeed David. And of this coming offspring, God declares, he is the one who will build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.

Now, when you read the fuller context of this declaration, I will be his father, and he will be my son. When you read this, it's clear, well, yes, that is true of Solomon. God will be his father, Solomon will be God's son, but it's not fully and completely realized, is it?

It's not true that his kingdom will endure forever, that his throne will be established forever. And the ancient rabbis are quite comfortable with this idea of a jewel fulfillment of prophecies, that there's an immediate application, in this case an application to Solomon, David's son, and then there's a further future fulfillment in the last days, a further fulfillment associated with the promised Messiah. The rabbis knew it was going to be true that the throne would be established forever, that ultimately an eternal king would come, that that would only be true in these last days in the Messiah. So if you're ever troubled by this sense that maybe the New Testament writers are reading too much into an Old Testament quotation, are kind of taking verses out of context and saying, well, now it means this. Well, you can be assured that as they do that, they're not really radically departing from what came before. When the apostles quote the scriptures to their Jewish audiences, these audiences who know fine well what is recorded in the Old Testament, when the apostles quote these things, that they're not usually saying, here is a completely new interpretation of this scripture that you've always known. No, they're saying the messianic understanding, which was always there, has now been fulfilled before your eyes. They're not saying you never understood it up till now. They're saying, here it is fulfilled. So God's Messiah, God's son, manifest before his people, the exact representation of God's being, the radiance of his glory, the only one of whom it can be truly and completely said, you are my son. Second group, how do the son and the angels relate to one another? This role of sonship is one indication of superiority. But the next pair of quotations bring a more direct comparison to show Jesus superior to the angels, the relationship explicitly defined with ideas that are drawn from Deuteronomy 32 and Psalm 97. Here, verse 6, again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, let all God's angels worship him.

So the writer here is taking passages that in their original context, as they were first written, in that context are calling for worship of God. And he takes those passages calling for God to be worshiped and applies them as commands to worship the son. Not only men on earth, but the angels of heaven are called to worship God's son. Remember, the angels know they themselves are not fitting objects of worship. Revelation 19.10 is very clear about that. In fact, they are servants, according to this second quotation, verse 7. If only God himself is to be worshipped, it's only legitimate to apply this call for worship to Jesus as God's firstborn if he is, in fact, himself God. This can't be merely a human son. This can't be merely an angelic son. He has to be fully and completely God if he is to be worshipped.

[ 16 : 45 ] So by comparison, the angels, even this impressive throng that forms this immense angelic choir, the angels in all of their fear-inspiring splendor, the angels are but servants. Verse 14 is going to pick it up again. Ministering spirits, not only serving God, but even sent to serve those who will inherit salvation, but also inherit salvation, sent to serve human beings. The angels are sent to serve you and me. So by contrast to these angels, these servants who are made, the next two quotations, verses 8 through 12, they focus on the eternal nature of the son. Not only is this son the king, implied by those first two quotations when we see them in their context, but here shown to be not only king, but the eternally exalted reigning king, the Lord of lords. Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever.

Verse 8. Again, we're taking language that's originally written about God, recorded in Psalm 45, and applying it now to the Son, who is just as much divine, just as much Lord of the universe.

This messianic ruler will have a reign of true morality, we're told. Of him it can be said justice will be an ever-present feature of his kingdom. Not only is he willing to go along with righteousness and avoid wickedness, no, he has loved one and he has hated the other. If some have considered Jesus to be one of the angels and therefore wondered whether he's really, truly, completely good, whether he can be trusted, whether he's actually just. I mean, some of the angels rebelled. Some of them fell from heaven.

Well, our writer says Jesus is far better than any angel. He's set above his companions as the one whose throne of perfect justice and peace will last forever and ever. How about that familiar Christmas reading? Isaiah 9. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness.

From that time on and forever, the zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. Then in this pair, the second quotation, verse 10 and following, this picks up this theme of eternity. He's Lord of creation, consummator of the universe. We saw this in the first couple of verses of the chapter last week. The Son is both creator and sustainer. See, the angels, the angels are not self-sustaining. Angels do not exist of their own essence. No, the angels are sustained by the Son just like everything else. Verse 7, they're made spirits, flames of fire. They're given these physical forms of us all for the tasks they're sent to accomplish, but this is granted to them, not inherent in them. By contrast, Christ the Lord laid the foundations of the earth. His throne will last forever and ever, unlike everything else. The whole created world, we're told here, is like the clothes you buy. It looks lovely at first, but a few washes in, a few weeks of being pulled about by children, a poorly chosen, drier setting. Sooner or later, it fades. The collar frays. One of the threads starts to pull. It gets snagged and torn, and sooner or later, it wears out. Probably even more true today in our disposable culture than when these words were written. Psalm 102 says that isn't only true of clothes that they wear out. It's true of everything. The sky itself, the sun, the moon, and the bright shining stars, all created things are subject to decay. They will perish. They will be changed. But the eternal Son, well, he's just that. Eternal. Ever the same. His years will never end.

[ 20 : 54 ] John 5, 26, as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself. The mountains. The mountains seem to us so permanent, don't they? They're not going anywhere.

The planets continue in their orbits. It all remains the same. But that's not the full picture. The truth is, even the longest lasting things are subject to decay. The mountains erode slowly but surely. Apparently, the Earth's rotation, it slows by two milliseconds per century.

Not something we need to worry about particularly. But compared to God, the mountains are like mayflies. The sun is superior to the angels because his life is his own, inherent to his very nature.

He has always been and will be ever the same. His years will never end. Finally, verse 13 brings us back to Psalm 110. Psalm 110, that verse 3 alluded to, as we thought about last week. Now that same Psalm is clearly quoted. To which of the angels did God ever say, sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet? Again, the author asks, to which of the angels did God ever say? Again, the obvious answer. God never said any such thing.

Why? Because verse 14, the angels are servants. Servants of God, servants of you and I. The most exalted of angels, angels like Gabriel, well, the most exalted angels were privileged to stand in the presence of God. Gabriel says that to Mary in Luke chapter 1 verse 19. That's what you do when you wait upon a king, isn't it? You stand and you wait for his instructions. The angels aren't invited to sit before God. Still less are they invited to sit at his right hand. Remember, the right hand is the place of honor, the place of favor, the place of authority. This king of Psalm 110, who we now see is truly the Messiah, the Son, the king of Psalm 110, is presented in that psalm as God's vice regent, as one who shares his authority, his honor, his prestige. Do you see? Christ our Lord sits enthroned at God's right hand until his enemies become his footstool. This is the goal of his activity, after which he will present his triumph to God the Father, and then he will reign forever and ever. Just as is proclaimed by the voices in heaven, the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever. Revelation 11.

[ 23 : 49 ] So what do we do with all this? We've seen in these verses the Son's superiority to the angels clearly displayed, but more than that, we've seen these divine attributes applied to him.

Eternal, omnipotent, perfectly just, the triumphant king whose victory is assured, a fitting object of worship. And therefore, therefore Christ the Son is sufficient, a perfectly trustworthy Savior.

Why is the name he has inherited more excellent than that of the angels? Because whilst they may serve us, only he can save us, only he can save us. He is both Son and Savior. In him, in him is found all that we need.

So, keep your eyes fixed on him. Whatever your troubles, whatever your needs, whatever your griefs, however many your anxieties, my friends, look to him alone. Look to Christ, the cornerstone. Look to his blood, his righteousness. Look to the Son, your Savior. Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, we rejoice in who you are. We rejoice that as we fix our eyes upon you, we see that you are sufficient for all things. That the struggles of our daily lives, that you have made provision for us. That our hope for the future is safe in your hands. That even as all things perish and fade and pass away, yet you remain the same, and our life is safe in your hands. Amen.