

Hebrews 1–2: Better Than Angels

November 2, 2014

The epistle of Hebrews was written to—you guessed it—Hebrews. These Jewish people had professed Jesus as their Messiah, but now they were beginning to suffer persecution by the Roman government as well as other Jews, their own families and former friends. Since the Jewish religion was allowed under Roman law, if they gave up Jesus as Messiah, they could avoid all this persecution. The writer tells them that if they turn away from faith in Jesus Christ, it will be to their own destruction. There is nothing else in which they can place their faith. Therefore, they must press on in faith in Jesus Christ.

Fact: The Son is better than the prophets (1:1-4).

The readers, as Jews, stood proudly in a stream of revelation from God begun at Mount Sinai almost 1,500 years earlier and continued through prophets at many different times and in many different ways (1:1). However, in this new age, God is speaking by Someone greater than his prophets: his Son. The greatness of God's Son is unquestionable: the Son is both Creator and rightful heir of all things (1:2). He is the exact representation of God the Father and he maintains and preserves the universe by his power and authority (1:3). He died to atone for sin and now sits in glory at the Father's right hand, his work finished, superior to every being in the universe (1:4).

Fact: The Son is better than angelic servants (1:5-14).

Jesus Christ is superior to all of creation, including the angels. Angels were created to serve God and do his bidding, having power far exceeding that of men. According to the Jewish religion, the Old Testament Law was given by God through angels (cf. 2:2; Acts 7:38, 53; Gal 3:19), so angels held a special place in their thinking. But God's relationship to his Son is different than to the angels. He never called the angels his son (1:5) and he actually commands his angels to worship his Son (1:6). The angels are his servants (1:7), but the Son is God's appointed ruler (1:8-12). The exalted position of universal Judge that will belong to his Son was never offered to an angel (1:13), because angels are God's servants, not his Son (1:14).

Warning: God punishes those who disobey His revelation (2:1-4).

God's Son is superior to God's angels (1:4), God's rule mediated by his Son involves both blessing and judgment (1:9), and the enemies of God's Son will be conquered and subdued (1:13). Therefore, we have only two options: continue in faith in God's Son, Jesus Christ, or stand in judgment before him (2:2). Clearly, Jesus was God's Messiah, as the eyewitnesses gave testimony (2:3) and as miracles and signs proved that he was from God (2:4).

Objection: How is a humbled Son better (2:5-9)?

A critical listener might be tempted to wonder about the Son's incarnation. Although Scripture assigns a greater position to the Son than angels (2:5), in coming to the earth, Jesus humbled himself and became "lower than the angels." Does this mean he is actually inferior to angels?

Jesus, being God, never became less than God, but he submitted to God's authority (2:6-8; cf. Phil 2:5-7) just like the angels do—remember, they are God's servants. However, the Son's subjection was *temporary* (2:7, 9). Angels will not rule the world to come, but the Son will

(2:8). While Jesus came to earth to suffer and die for mankind, now he has ascended to heaven, where he is “crowned with glory and honor” (2:9).

Objection: How is a suffering Son better (2:10–18)?

The Son is superior to angels in Scripture, and even his incarnation and temporary humbling do not render him inferior to angels. But the Son did not come to earth and enjoy great privilege and acclamation; rather, he came to earth and suffered. How does this suffering fit with the greatness of the Son?

Actually, it was fitting for the Founder of our salvation, Jesus Christ, to suffer while here on earth (2:10), because he has experienced what it is like to be a human being. He was not embarrassed to be called our brother (2:11). Just like those suffering persecution, Jesus shared in the worst possible persecution during his time on earth (2:14). The angels do not enjoy this kind of help or companionship; only those who exercise saving faith like Abraham did enjoy the comfort and help of the Son of God (2:16). Furthermore, Jesus is the ultimate High Priest: he is consummately compassionate because he has suffered with us (2:17–18).

To Think About:

Do we believe the Son is superior to God’s revealed Word (cf. John 1:18)? Is your study of God’s Word a means toward growing more like Jesus Christ, or is it an end in itself? Do you think of your sanctification as simply knowing the Bible better? Do you assume you are superior to other Christians because you know the Bible better than they do?

What does Jesus’ humiliation tell us about our own willingness to submit our wills and ideas to others (cf. Phil 2:1–10; Rom 15:1–4)?

How does Jesus’ experience of suffering encourage our hearts in dark times?

What does Jesus’ high priestly ministry mean to us (besides closing our prayers with “in Jesus’ name”)?

Praying through the Epistle to the Hebrews:

For my own heart: thank God for such a merciful and faithful high priest (2:17)

For my brothers and sisters in Christ: to pay attention to what we have heard (2:1)

For my church: that WBC would lift our eyes to consider Jesus, our brother priest (2:17)