

5. The balance of chapter two continues the writer's larger argument concerning the Son's superiority to the angels, but with a notable shift in emphasis. The previous section highlighted the Son's *regal* supremacy – the fact that He is God's anointed King and Sovereign through whom He governs and upholds all things. That dimension of superiority implicated the Son's humanity, since it's as the messianic Son of David that Jesus exercises His rule at God's right hand. This next section (2:5-9) continues the same essential emphasis, but as focusing more explicitly on the Son's humanity. He is superior to the angels as God's royal sovereign, but as He is *True Man*.

This is evident from the passage the writer used to introduce and frame this section. He cited from Psalm 8, which is another psalm penned by David. It, too, has messianic overtones, though it isn't as overtly messianic as some of the previous psalms the writer drew from (Psalms 2, 45, and 110). This psalm sings God's praises, marveling at His wisdom and glory in creation, but as it has its focal point in *man*, the unique image-son. Psalm 8 celebrates the Creator-God by celebrating the being that He created in His own image and likeness to administer His rule over His creation. And so this psalm, too, is a royal psalm, but one that advances the writer's argument by enlarging its scope.

- 1) First, it moves the concept of Jesus' regal sovereignty beyond His status as the messianic *Son of David* to His identity as the *Last Adam* – man in truth.
- 2) But, again, this movement is only an expansion. For the messianic concept and messianic revelation, which reached their apex in David and the Davidic Covenant, are central to God's outworking of His purpose for *man*. The Scriptures emphasize that the regal Son of David – the Messiah the Scriptures revealed and promised – would both embody the reality of man as regal image-son, and be the instrument by which the human race would at last attain to this created design.

The balance of chapter 2 continues and develops the theme of Jesus' superiority to the angels, and it does so as building on the writer's exhortation, as well as his previous instruction. Thus the basic structure of the overall context (1:3-2:18): The exhortation of 2:1-4 reflects and focuses the instruction in chapter one, and this exhortation then provides the springboard for the instruction that completes the chapter and larger context.

- a. The writer shows this relationship by his transitional term: "***For, He did not subject to angels the world to come...***" This term is an inferential conjunction, meaning that it introduces an inference drawn from the preceding material. In this instance, the inference looks back to the exhortation that immediately precedes it, or to the previous instruction in chapter one, or to both.
  - Some believe that the writer's exhortation forms a parenthesis, and so view his inference as looking back to the argumentation that closes out chapter one. Thus his point: *Angels are simply ministering spirits, sent out to render service to the heirs of salvation. It is those human heirs to whom God has determined to subject the world to come.*

- Others believe the inference is more closely tied to the exhortation itself. In this case, the writer was tying the obligation of faithfulness to Christ's salvation to the fact that the world to come is to be ruled by human beings. His point, then, seems to be that the saints' regal destiny in God's purposes for His creation should drive their understanding and orientation toward the salvation that is theirs in Jesus. They need to conscientiously attend to this salvation in the present, because it has its goal in the world to come and their role in it.

However, it's not necessary to choose one view over the other. In fact, the flow of the passage suggests that the writer was drawing his inference from all that precedes it. Even if the inference most specifically refers to 2:1-4, that exhortation flows directly from the preceding instruction. So also, viewing 2:1-4 as a parenthesis doesn't change the fact that it binds together the instruction that precedes it and the inference that follows. And because 2:5 introduces the argument that finishes out the chapter, it's best to view this verse as drawing an inference that implicates the entirety of the first two chapters. For these chapters are concerned with God's ultimate design for His creation, which has His human creature at the center, even as it has its focal point in Jesus the Messiah.

And so verses 5-8 continue the writer's line of argumentation, which is that the Son is superior to the angels as God's enthroned King and sovereign Lord. At the same time, he shifted his emphasis: The human dimension of Jesus' lordship (evident in the Davidic contexts cited by the writer) now takes center stage. And not merely with respect to Jesus, but the entire human race. Jesus' status as the glorified, enthroned Son of Man has its ultimate goal in man's regal destiny as image-son; it is to *man*, not angels, that God has subjected the world to come.

- b. Again, the writer elaborated on this truth by citing from Psalm 8, which praises the Creator in view of the surprising and remarkable place man holds in His design for His creation. The psalm concerns the *human creature* and not a specific person, but the Hebrews author applied it specifically to the *one man*, Jesus. Some have argued that he made this application based on the psalm's use of the expression, "son of man." Jesus appropriated this expression as His primary form of self-designation, and the claim is that this led the Hebrews writer to see a reference to Him in the psalm (cf. also Daniel 7:13, which was also interpreted messianically, both by the Jews and the early Christians). But in reality, the writer's connection of this psalm with Jesus goes far beyond terminology.

In the psalm, and elsewhere in the Old Testament scriptures, the phrase, "son of man," is a synonym for *man* (note the parallelism in the question in Psalm 8:4). The expression, "son of..." emphasizes a person or thing's likeness to something else; so a "son of lawlessness" is a person characterized by lawlessness. Thus the phrase, "son of man," emphasizes the nature and qualities of humanness, and so was an eminently appropriate way for Jesus to refer to Himself; in every respect and to the fullest degree, He was the truly human One.

- c. “Son of man” highlights humanness in distinction from other created beings, and the psalmist looked to the creation account to identify that distinction. What distinguishes man from all other created beings – including angels – is his created identity and function. Man alone is created in God’s own image and likeness, but for the purpose of manifesting God’s tangible presence and administering His rule over His creation (cf. Psalm 8:5-8 with Genesis 1:26-28). Form always follows function, and man is image-*bearer* for the sake of his role as image-*son*. The glory of man is his unique status as image-son; by design, all things submit to the Creator’s sovereign lordship by being in subjection to the human son who shares the divine image and likeness.

The author of Hebrews could read Jesus into Psalm 8 precisely because He is man in truth – man as depicted and celebrated in the Psalm; man existing according to his created nature and function as ordained by God from the beginning. But the writer was acknowledging and highlighting more than this:

*His ultimate reason for interpreting Psalm 8 in terms of Jesus was his recognition that human destiny – the human existence that the psalm celebrates – is realized in Jesus; **man becomes truly man in the Son of Man.***

He understood that Psalm 8 applies to human beings *as such* because it applies first and foremost to the man Jesus. Or, to put it the other way round, this psalm cannot speak of the creature man except as it first speaks of the singular Man. For as he exists in himself in his present state, man isn’t – and cannot be – the glorious image-son celebrated in the psalm. Unless the Son of Man is its true subject, the psalm’s portrayal is only a cruel deception, and the psalm itself evaporates as an empty and idle wish-dream.

- d. The Hebrews writer highlighted human lordship as realized in the Son, but he associated it with “*the world to come.*” Was he, then, denying Son’s rule over the present world? If so, this sets him at odds with the apostolic witnesses, and even Jesus Himself (cf. Matthew 28:18 with Acts 2:34-36; Ephesians 1:18-23; etc.). A few observations are helpful in this regard.
- 1) First, the writer wasn’t merely affirming the Son’s (and man’s) rule in the world to come, but denying that this rule will belong to *angels* (v. 5). There was a tradition in Israel (not least in the Qumran community of the Essenes associated with the Dead Sea Scrolls) that assigned a central role to angels in God’s governance of the world in the *Olam Ha Ba* (the renewed world of the messianic age). For their part, the Essenes believed that two messianic figures (one regal and one priestly) would govern God’s kingdom in the messianic age, but both would be subject to the *archangel Michael*. Michael was a powerful “lord” on Yahweh’s behalf in the present world (Daniel 10), and so he would be in the age to come. The epistle’s Jewish audience was almost certainly aware of this tradition, and many believe the writer’s statement was directed toward it.

- 2) Second, the writer stated that this “world to come” was the subject of his instruction – that “concerning which we are speaking.” This provides important insight into his meaning, for the larger context is concerned with the *present* reality of Jesus’ lordship as God’s messianic King. In some sense at least, the writer clearly believed that the “world to come” already exists in the present. Moreover, he associated this coming world with the salvation that Jesus proclaimed and His followers have entered into.

If verse 5 only pertained to vv. 1-4, one might possibly argue that the idea of a *present* salvation is consistent with an *entirely future* “world.” That is, the writer was warning and exhorting his readers to be faithful with the salvation they possess in the present, in view of the fact that they are heirs of a “world to come.” But it is clear from the wider context that the writer was looking beyond simply 2:1-4 when he said that the world to come was the subject of his instruction.

- 3) A third observation builds on and reinforces the previous one. And that is the writer’s statement that the subjection of all things to the Son is not fully realized: “*we do not yet see all things subjected to Him*” (v. 8b). At the same time, he clearly believed that the human lordship celebrated in the psalm and centered in the Son is a present reality; even now, “*we see Jesus “crowned with glory and honor”*” (cf. vv. 7, 9).

The implication of all of this is that Jesus’ sovereign reign as the Son of David and Last Adam is an *already-but-not-yet* phenomenon. He rules as the True Man crowned with glory and honor, and the messianic King enthroned at God’s right hand (ref. 1:3, 8-9, 13). Jesus possesses all authority in heaven and earth, but not everything presently yields to His authority. In the words of the Hebrews writer, He has taken His throne, but His enemies have not yet become, in the ultimate sense, the footstool for His feet (cf. 1:13, 2:8).

This same *already-but-not-yet* principle applies to the “world to come.” Again, this expression translates the Jewish concept of *Olam Ha Ba*, and the Jewish readers of the epistle would certainly have interpreted it that way. In Jewish eschatology, *Olam Ha Ba* refers to the messianic age – the kingdom of God – that Messiah would inaugurate through His triumph. He would conquer the powers that had taken Yahweh’s people captive, and so liberate the prisoners and restore them to their God. But because Israel’s subjugation resulted from covenant violation, restoration meant *reconciliation* – the renewal of the covenant relationship. From Israel’s side, this meant cleansing, forgiveness and a new heart; it meant life out of death, the resurrection from the dead (cf. Deuteronomy 30:1-6; Ezekiel 36-37). From Yahweh’s side, it meant the restoration of His dwelling place and His return to take His place in the midst of His people (Isaiah 40, 59; Ezekiel 37; Zechariah 1-2). This is the *Olam Ha Ba* – the “world to come,” and Jesus inaugurated this new world in Himself as the exalted firstborn from the dead. The “world to come” has broken in, but as yet awaiting its fullness.