

Hebrews 1: 8-14 “The Son and the Angels: Reading the Bible with the Apostles” Jan 3, 2021
Deuteronomy 32
Psalm 102

Dt 32:43 (Ps 97:7)
Psalm 104:4
Ps 45:6-7; Ps 102:25-27; Ps 110:1

Deuteronomy 32 is the “song of Moses” which he teaches Israel before his death.
It is a song that speaks of Israel’s past – and Israel’s future.

Dt 32 speaks of Israel as God’s son – and how he gave an inheritance to Jacob.
But Israel rebelled – the pattern that was established in the wilderness
would continue throughout the time of the Judges and the Kings.

You don’t need to be a prophet to realize that humanity is really good at messing things up!
If you know even a little about history –
or if you are just a careful observer of other people! –
it’s pretty obvious that humanity keeps digging the hole deeper!!

Even God’s people – “they are a nation void of counsel...
if they were wise, they would understand this!” (v28)

But at the end of the song, Moses says that God will have compassion on them –
when he sees that their power is gone!

And in verse 43, Moses says,
“Rejoice with him, O heavens; bow down to him, all gods.”

Hebrews will tell us that this is speaking of the angels –
who are called to bow down to *him* –
who are they bowing down to?
They are bowing down to the God who comes to save his people.

Sure, Moses probably didn’t understand all the details of the incarnation.
But as Hebrews reflects on the Song of Moses,
Hebrews realizes that this is what the Song of Moses was saying!!

The God who delivered Israel from Egypt would also deliver them again –
but in a far more remarkable way!

And that is where our Psalm of response comes in.
Psalm 102 is “a prayer of one afflicted,

when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the LORD.”

The Psalmist speaks in the voice of the Son of David.

The “I” in the song is the Messiah – the suffering servant of the LORD.

Psalm 102 is one of those songs that seems like it comes to a resolution –
only to bring the problem back up again.

Hebrews 1 explains why Psalm 102 does this.

Because the last stanza of the Psalm is addressed to the Son.

It’s ambiguous in the Hebrew text –

but the author of the book of Hebrews sees in the words of Psalm 102
the language of God’s promises to David –

and so he teaches us to take that seriously when we sing the song with Jesus!

Sing Psalm 102

Read Hebrews 1

People sometimes ask me who has been most influential in shaping the way I read scripture.

Certainly the early Fathers have influenced me a great deal.

And my professors at Westminster encouraged this –

and there are some modern scholars who have done likewise.

But what they taught me was to look more carefully at how scripture interprets scripture.

Some people insist that the “grammatical-historical” method
is the only way to get at the “true” meaning of a text.

But why do they say that?

Why should we believe that the grammatical-historical method is “right one”?

Yes, it is important to understand grammar, syntax, and historical context –
but what does *God* say about how to read scripture?!

Does the Bible say anything about how to read scripture?

The Westminster Confession insists that Scripture is the standard for interpretation:

“The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself:

and therefore, when there is a question

about the true and full sense of any Scripture

(which is not manifold, but one),

it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly.”

If you want to know how to interpret scripture – pay attention to scripture!

Learn from the prophets and the apostles how to interpret the scriptures.

And for that task, there is no book of the Bible better suited than the book of Hebrews!
Here in Hebrews we get to see the divinely inspired way of handling the OT!
If you are used to focusing on the plain, literal meaning of the text,
then Hebrews will throw you for a loop!
Because Hebrews doesn't follow a strict grammatical-historical method of interpretation!
Hebrews sees the whole of the Old Testament as pointing to Christ.

As we saw last week,
Hebrews weaves quotations from the OT into its argument about who Jesus is.
It's not that Hebrews uses "proof texts"
but rather that Hebrews weaves OT quotations and ideas
into the very fabric of his own text.
Hebrews is demonstrating that the OT is all about Christ.

Last time we talked about the Son "inheriting" a name more excellent than the angels.
And that name is the name of Son.
In his person he was already the eternal Son of God.
But in the history of redemption,
he did not yet have a more exalted name than the angels.
They had mediated the Mosaic covenant,
which was the most glorious work of redemption that God had done.
Therefore the name of Moses and of the angels was the greatest redemptive name
(which may also explain why the angels are called the sons of God in
Ps 29:1, Ps 89:7, and Job 1:6).
But now Jesus has inherited that name that was appointed for him
from before the foundation of the world—
the name of "Son."

Introduction: Why Angels?

Perhaps the first question we need to address is "why angels?"
Why does Hebrews start by saying that Christ is superior to the angels?

There was a lot of speculation about angels in second temple Judaism.
(Second Temple Judaism refers to a period in Jewish history from around 500 BC to 70 AD—
Solomon had built the first temple, which lasted from around 1000 BC to 586 BC,
when Nebuchadnezzar destroyed it.
Then Zerubbabel built the second temple around 515 BC,
which stood until the Romans demolished it in 70 AD.)

By the time of the apostles, angels had become very important in Jewish thought.
Angels were not only God's messengers,
they were his agents, accomplishing his purposes,

mediating his covenants.
Indeed, in some Jewish circles, especially those influenced by Greek thought,
it was thought that God could not have direct contact with his creation,
and so therefore all God's dealing with man must be mediated by angels.
While Paul insists that Jesus is our only mediator,
he grants that angels were mediators of the Mosaic covenant.
In Galatians 3:19 he says that the law was "put in place through angels."
While he doesn't expound that further,
Paul makes it clear that angels had an instrumental role in the Mosaic covenant.

So also here, Hebrews 1 suggests that the angels played an important role in the OT.

But the role of the angels has been superseded by one who is himself greater than the angels.

1. Angels Are Called to Worship the Son (Dt 32:43)

⁶ *And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,*

"Let all God's angels worship him."

And so Hebrews says that God has now spoken through his Son.

Hebrews 1:1-4 says that the eternal Son has inherited
the name of eschatological Son.

Hebrews now sets out to demonstrate this from scripture—from the OT.

Last week we looked at verse five,

which combines 2 Samuel 7:14 with Psalm 2 to say that
Jesus is the Son of David who is exalted to the right hand of the Father.

Solomon was the initial son of David who was declared the Son of God,
but Jesus' resurrection results in his being declared the Son of God;
in other words, he is declared the Davidic king,
the one to whom Solomon was pointing.

In verse six, then he quotes Deuteronomy 32:43.

"When he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,
'Let all God's angels worship him.'"

When we read Dt 32, we heard

"Bow down to him, all gods,"
where the "him" is plainly God - Yahweh,
and what is bowing down are the idols of the nations.

Hebrews is quoting from the Septuagint (and perhaps even the translation
of the Song of Moses found in the Odes of Solomon),

but this song was well known in the synagogue and in the early church.

If you think about it, the Song of Moses is all about
how God brought his firstborn (Israel) into the promised land.

God had said of Israel in Exodus 4 – “Israel is my son, my firstborn.”
And so God brought Israel out of Egypt and exalted him in the “new age” –
the Mosaic Age.

But notice also, how verse 6 says “when he brings the firstborn into the world.”
In Moses day, this meant bring Israel from Egypt to Sinai –
and thus to the Promised Land.

But now, Hebrews uses Dt 32:43 to say that God has brought Jesus, his firstborn,
into the “world.”

I really wish that the ESV had not used the word “world” here –
because this is not the Greek word “kosmos”–the normal Greek word for world.

This is the word “oekonomene”–from which we get our word, “economy.”
If it had said, “when God brings his firstborn into the kosmos”
that would be a reference to the incarnation.
But it says “when God brought his firstborn into the oekonomene”
that means, “when God brings his firstborn into the new age.”

When Jesus is raised from the dead, the new age dawns.
Just as God brought his firstborn into the land in the Mosaic “economy”
so now, in Jesus, God brings his firstborn into the new “economy.”

If you look over at 2:5, you see the same word, “oekonomene”:
God has subjected the “world to come” (literally, the “economy to come”)
to the Son.

The old economy – the old age – was the age of Moses.
The new economy – the age to come – is the Age of the Son of God.

And this connects perfectly with what Dt 32 is doing.

Dt 32 is all about God’s eschatological deliverance of his people–
“The LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants.”
Moses had been talking about how God will, in the end, deliver his people,
and destroy their enemies.

And that is what God has done in Jesus Christ.

The worship that Moses said was due to God for his great salvation,
is now due to Jesus!

2. The True Function of Angels (Psalm 104:4)

⁷ *Of the angels he says,*

*“He makes his angels winds,
and his ministers a flame of fire.”*

Verse 7 then explains the true function of angels:

And to the angels he says, “he makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.”
This is a citation of Psalm 104:4.

The Hebrew text says, “who makes the winds his messengers,
flames of fire his servants.”

The LXX (the Greek translation most commonly used in the first century)
translated this as a reference to angelic beings.

“ruach” the Hebrew word for “wind” is also the word for “spirit”
so it was easy for the LXX to read angels into the verse.

And Hebrews simply takes the commonly understood meaning of the text,
and uses it to make the very proper point—that angels are but servants.

Angels are ministers – they are those whom God commissions for various tasks –
but they do not compare to the Son!

Just a note about translation:

These two citations, from Dt 32 and Psalm 104 make it clear
that our modern notions of the accuracy of translation
does not necessarily coincide with God’s!

Hebrews is using a questionable translation of the OT,
but that did not stop God from inspiring Hebrews!

Our doctrine of inerrancy does not say that the biblical authors
always used a perfect translation—rather,
it says that with whatever translation they used,
they taught the perfect Word of God.

3. The Eternal Reign of the Son (Psalm 45)

⁸ *But of the Son he says,*

*“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever,
the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.*

⁹ *You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;
therefore God, your God, has anointed you
with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.”*

Verse 8-9 then quotes Psalm 45,
the wedding song of the Son of David.

Psalm 45 speaks of the Davidic king in divine language.
The Son of David is God's representative on earth.
When it says "Your throne, O God" –
it is not speaking to Yahweh – but to the Son of David!
After all, in the next verse it says that God, your God, has anointed you...

The picture here is very much what we saw last week –
as Jesus inherits the name of Son when he ascends to the right hand of God.

Yes, he was already the Son of God from all eternity according to his divine nature.
And he was already the incarnate Son of God according to his human nature –
at least in principle.

But until he actually sat down on his throne at the right hand of the Father,
he was not yet the eschatological Son of God.

He had not yet inherited that name.

Think about it this way:
are *you* children of God?

Yes!

And yet Paul says in Romans 8 that *we groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons*.
We are still waiting eagerly for *our* adoption – as Paul puts it,
"the redemption of our bodies."
We have been adopted as sons – by faith!
But there is still one part of our adoption that is incomplete.

Our bodies are still perishable.

We *long* for the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting!

And that's what Jesus has received!!
In his case he was not "adopted" – he was the Son of God by nature!
But as the firstborn son, Jesus has received from the Father
all that was promised to Adam, to Abraham, to Israel, to David!

And as Psalm 45 sees clearly:

his reign is eternal.
The eternal nature of the Son's rule will be a recurring theme in Hebrews.

But this passage is also cited because of its reference to the Son's "companions."
Psalm 45 was originally addressed to the Davidic kings.
The companions were his brothers and friends.
But Hebrews is saying, "if this was true of the Davidic kings,
how much more is it true of the eschatological Son of David?!"

But then Hebrews gets even more challenging!

4. The Son Is the Yahweh Who Made All Things (Psalm 102:25-27)

¹⁰ *And,*

*"You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning,
and the heavens are the work of your hands;*

¹¹ *they will perish, but you remain;
they will all wear out like a garment,*

¹² *like a robe you will roll them up,
like a garment they will be changed.*^[a]

*But you are the same,
and your years will have no end."*

Verses 10-12 then cite Psalm 102:25-27,
which is another passage that at first blush does not appear to be "Messianic."
This is referring to how the Lord created all things,
and yet while they perish and change, he remains the same forever.

And yet Hebrews says that this is about the Son.

But when you consider that Hebrews has already affirmed that the Son
is the one through whom God created the world,
and that the Son is the radiance of the glory of God, and the stamp of his nature,
then it is not so surprising to discover Hebrews
using a passage that is explicitly about Yahweh to refer to Jesus.

The angels are part of the created order,
but the Son is the creator ("through whom also he created the world")

Hebrews is taking this as God's response to the Davidic King.

In Psalm 102, the Son of David says,

"O my God, take me not away in the midst of my days" –
this is the prayer from the cross –

the plea of our Lord Jesus "into your hands I commit my spirit"!

And I think that most translators and interpreters have assumed that the same Davidic voice continues in the rest of the Psalm.

But Hebrews suggests that this is actually spoken *of* the Son:

“You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning,
and the heavens are the work of your hands.”

Once you realize that Jesus Christ is actually God –
that he was in the beginning with the Father –
and that the Father made all things *through him* –
then you realize that Hebrews is simply right!

Sure, there’s a Davidic voice in Psalm 102 –
but that Davidic voice begins to blend with the voice of the Lord –
because the Word became flesh and dwelt among us!

As you are reading the scriptures – watch for these connections!
God put them there so that we might see them!

5. The Son Sits at the Right Hand of God (Psalm 110:1)

¹³ *And to which of the angels has he ever said,*

*“Sit at my right hand
until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?*

Hebrews then concludes his selection of OT texts with Psalm 110:1

“And to which of the angels has he ever said,
‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’?”

Psalm 110 is the most frequently cited OT text in the NT.

Paul, Acts, Hebrews and Revelation all quote this Psalm.

It will be a centerpiece of Hebrews’ argument about the priesthood of Christ later.

But here he introduces it as the crowning proof that Jesus is the Son of God.

But again, it focuses on the reign and rule of the Son—
he is the Son of David who rules as God’s vicegerent,
thereby demonstrating that he is the Son of God.

Now, having looked at these various texts,

I’d like for you to see how they relate back to what 1:1-4 says about the Son.

“Whom he appointed the heir of all things” (2b)

This is the point of the quotations in verses 5-9

“Through whom he also created the world” (2c)

This is the point of the quotation in verse 10
“The radiance of the glory of God and the stamp of his nature” (3a)
This is the point of verses 11-12—the unchangeable glory of the Son.
“Having become as much superior to angels
as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.”
This is the point of the whole passage,
but especially summed up in verse 13.

In other words, this array of OT texts is marshaled in order to demonstrate
what Hebrews 1:1-4 has said.

The whole of OT revelation was brought through angelic mediators,
but now the one who mediated creation itself has mediated the final revelation—
the great redemption that God had promised.

And there is even a chiasmic structure in the arrangement of the quotations:

note that the introduction of verses 5 and 13 say,

“To which of the angels,” did God ever say...

And the introductions to verses 6 and 8 speak of the Son:

when he brings the firstborn into the world...

But of the Son he says...

And the center of the arrangement in verse 7:

“Of the angels he says...”

The quotations in Hebrews 1 are designed to center around the angels,
only to show that the angels are not the center!

Hence what sounds like an anti-climactic conclusion in verse 14:

¹⁴ Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

Jesus has inherited the great and glorious name of Son.

Now we are made his fellow-heirs,

and indeed, far from being our masters,

the angels are sent to serve for our sakes.

Notice that while 1:1-4 end with Christ’s inheritance,

1:5-14 ends with our inheritance.

Angels belong to the created order,

the Son is the one who created all things.

Chapter 1 is showing that because the Son is the creator, he is superior to the angels.

Chapter 2 will show that because the Son has identified with us,

he is also superior to the angels!

He shares in the divine nature;
he also shares in our humanity.

Therefore he has inherited a name that is above all created things!

And again,

we must see where this is taking us.

Why does Hebrews tell us all this about Jesus?

Remember that the book is called a “word of exhortation.”

“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard,
lest we drift away from it.”

If the message declared by angels was reliable (the Mosaic Covenant),

how much better is it when God speaks through his Son!

If the transgression of the first covenant received “just retribution,”

“How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?”

The problems of the first century and the problems of the 21st century aren't that different!

Hebrews seems to think that there are Christians who are tempted to fall away.

God has spoken in Jesus Christ his final word—

his eschatological speech.

This is God's most glorious message.

Hear him!