

Hebrews 1:4-2:4

Jesus Greater Than Angels

Long ago, at many times and ^(A)in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, ² but ^(B)in these last days ^(C)he has spoken to us by ^(D)his Son, whom he appointed ^(E)the heir of all things, ^(F)through whom also he created ^(G)the world. ³ He is the radiance of the glory of God and ^(H)the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. ^(I)After making purification for sins, ^(J)he sat down ^(K)at the right hand of the Majesty on high, ⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name ^(L)he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

⁵ For to which of the angels did God ever say,

^(M)“You are my Son,
today I have begotten you”?

Or again,

^(N)“I will be to him a father,
and he shall be to me a son”?

⁶ And again, when he brings ^(O)the firstborn into the world, he says,

^(P)“Let all God's angels worship him.”

⁷ Of the angels he says,

^(Q)“He makes his angels winds,
and his ministers a flame of fire.”

⁸ But of the Son he says,

^(R)“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, ^(S)has anointed you
with ^(T)the oil of gladness beyond your companions.”

¹⁰ And,

^(U)“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 ^(V)the same,
 and your years will have no end.”

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

^(W)“Sit at my right hand
^(X)until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?

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

2 Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. ² For since ^(A)the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and ^(B)every transgression or disobedience received a just ^(C)retribution, ³ ^(D)how shall we escape if we ^(E)neglect such a great salvation? It was ^(F)declared at first by the Lord, and it was ^(G)attested to us ^(H)by those who heard, ⁴ ^(I)while God also bore witness ^(J)by signs and wonders and various miracles and by ^(K)gifts of the Holy Spirit ^(L)distributed according to his will.

Intro:

In our previous lessons three messages from the book of Hebrews we have seen that Jesus is final prophet of God, that he is of an essence, of a nature that is of a different category than the previous human prophets, that he is One who is the very heir of God, he is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, that he is the shining of God on earth and the very exact revelation of God himself, and if that were not enough, he is the one who make purification for our sins. And because of his great work of redemption, he has been received at the right hand of God from where he sovereignly rules.

So, since such a great prophet has come, why would anyone want to revert to the revelation of human prophets when a divine prophet has now come?

Now the writer to the Hebrews begins to deal with the whole issue of angels in the purpose of God, and especially with the role that they have had in the revelation of God’s will to mankind.

The text now goes on to say of this great final Prophet who has come from God that he....

⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name ^(L)he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

Phil. 2:9 - Therefore (B)God has (C)highly exalted him and bestowed on him (D)the name that is above every name,

William Lane: p. 20

“It was broadly accepted in Judaism that the law of God had been delivered to Israel through angels.

Acts 7:38 - This is the one (A)who was in the congregation in the wilderness with (B)the angel who spoke to him at Mount Sinai, and with our fathers. (C)He received (D)living (E)oracles to give to us.

:53 - you who received the law (A)as delivered by angels and (B)did not keep it.”

Gal. 3:19 - Why then the law? (A)It was added because of transgressions, (B)until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was (C)put in place through angels (D)by an intermediary.

“The Jewish Christians to whom he sent his sermon shared this belief (2:2 - ²For since (A)the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and (B)every transgression or disobedience received a just (C)retribution,) and found in it a strong reason for respecting the law as the word of God. The exposition of Jesus’ superiority to the angels (1:5-14) directly prepares the audience for the pastor’s earnest plea not to neglect the message of salvation which was delivered by Jesus (2:1-4).

Wm Lane: p. 24ff

“In the OT angels were ascribed a broad role in revelation and in redemptive history. It was commonly understood that the Law had been mediated to Moses, the greatest of the prophets, through angels. That understanding was shared by the preacher and his friends, for at a later point in this section the Mosaic Law is described as “the message spoken by angels” (2:2). The assertion that Christ is superior to the angels (1:4) prepares for the demonstration of that superiority in the next paragraph (1:5-14). This demonstration, in turn, is foundational to the thought that the new revelation through the Son is far superior to the old revelation mediated by the angels (2:1-4).”

“In summary, in verse 1 the preacher directed attention to the human mediators of the old revelation – the prophets. In verse 4 he calls attention to the heavenly mediators of the old revelation – the angels. ...to the mediators of the older revelation ...his friends had responded with respect and obedience. “

“In the 2nd paragraph (1:5-14) the preacher brings together a chain of OT passages which demonstrate the superiority of the Son to the angels. ...to lay a firm foundation for the solemn appeal he will make to pay the closest attention to

the word spoken through God's Son (2:1-4). The several passages from the OT were carefully chosen to correspond to the declarations concerning the Son of God in the (p. 35 begins) opening lines of the sermon. The string of quotations has been arranged to parallel and support the preachers' confession of Jesus as the Son of God. "

1:1-4

1:4-13

A – Appointment as royal
Heir (v. 2b)

A' – Appointment as royal Son
and heir (v.5-9)

B – Mediator of the creation (v. 2c) B' – Mediator of the creation (v.
10)

C – Eternal nature and
Pre-existent glory (v. 3a)

C' – Unchanging, eternal nature
(v.11-12)

D – Exaltation to God's right hand
(v. 3c)

D' – Exaltation to God's right hand
(v. 13)

"The comparison between Jesus and the angels considers four points:

- 1) his name is greater than theirs:
he is acclaimed as "my Son" (v. 5) [he never called an angel his "son"]
- 2) his dignity is greater than theirs:
he is worthy of worship (v. 6) [they are servants]
- 3) his status is greater than theirs: [he is creator; they are creatures]
he remains unchanged (v. 7-12)
- 4) his function is greater than theirs
he reigns at God's right hand (v. 13-14)"

⁵ For to which of the angels did God ever say,

(M) "You are my Son,
today I have begotten you"?

Psalm 2:7 - I will tell of the decree:
The LORD said to me, **(A)** "You are my Son;
today I have begotten you.

Wm Lane: This is "royal formula" of recognition. It is God's own declaration and will that accords Jesus this honor of being the Son of God, of being enthroned...."

p. 35 – “There is a certain degree of unresolved tension in the writer’s designation of Jesus as the Son, since that designation can be applied to the eternal Son, or to the incarnate Son, or to the exalted Son. ...Although Jesus was the eternal Son of God, he experienced new dimensions of sonship by virtue of his incarnation, his sacrificial death, and his subsequent exaltation. These new dimensions find expression in the legal formula of recognition: “You are my Son.”

Or again,

(N)“I will be to him a father,
and he shall be to me a son”?

2 Sam. 7:14 - I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.

Psalm 89:26-27 – He shall cry to me, ‘You are my **(BF)**Father,
my God, and **(BG)**the Rock of my salvation.’

²⁷ And I will make him the **(BH)**firstborn,
(BI)the highest of the kings of the earth.

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

(P)“Let all God's angels worship him.”

Deut. 32:43 - **(A)**“Rejoice with him, O heavens;^[a]
bow down to him, all gods,
for he **(B)**avenges the blood of his children^[c]
and takes vengeance on his adversaries.
He repays those who hate him^[d]
and cleanses^[e] his people's land.”

The 2nd line above is found in the LXX but not in the Masoretic text.

Psalm 97:7 - All worshipers of images are **(A)**put to shame,
who make their boast in **(B)**worthless idols;
(C)worship him, all you gods!

⁷ Of the angels he says,

(Q)“He makes his angels winds,
and his ministers a flame of fire.”

Psalm 104:4 - he **(A)**makes his messengers winds,
his **(B)**ministers **(C)**a flaming fire.

What we see here is that God “makes” the angels certain things. Evidently, they can be changed by God to wind or to fire. In other words, their form their

purpose, could be changed by God – because they are creatures, made to serve God.

This is in contrast to the Son who is eternal, unchangeable, and the creator himself.

At the end of this sermon, the writer affirms this truth when he writes in 13:8: *Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.*

Wm Lane: *the function of the Son is to rule; the function of the angels is to serve.*
P. 36

⁸ **But of the Son he says,**

(R)“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, **(S)** has anointed you
with **(T)** the oil of gladness beyond your companions.

Psalm 45:6-7 - Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.

The **(L)** scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness;
⁷ **(M)** you have loved righteousness and hated wickedness.
Therefore **(N)** God, your God, has **(O)** anointed you
with the oil of **(P)** gladness **(Q)** beyond your companions;

¹⁰ **And,**

(U)“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 **(V)** the same,
and your years will have no end.”

Psalm 102:25-27 - ²⁵ Of old you laid the foundation of the earth,
and **(AV)** the heavens are the work of your hands.

²⁶ **(AW)** They will perish, but **(AX)** you will remain;
they will all wear out like a garment.

You will change them like a robe, and they will pass away,
²⁷ but **(AY)** you are the same, and your years have no end.

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

(W) “Sit at my right hand
(X) until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?

Psalm 110:1 - The LORD says to my Lord:

(B) “Sit at my right hand,
(C) until I make your enemies your **(D)** footstool.”

This is part of a conversation that the Church on earth is privileged to overhear – a conversation between the Father and the Son.

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

The angels have their place in the redemptive plan of God, but it is not the place that the Son has. He is exalted and honored at the right hand of God. But the angels are servants to those who are “to inherit salvation.” The Lord Jesus is the greatest person, they are far lesser creatures. Why give honor to the lesser when the greater truly is far more worthy?

What we should also see here is the because of the angels we have help and protection from spiritual forces that are hostile to the gospel and to Christians.

You remember it was the angel Gabriel who came to the virgin Mary and announced to her that she would become pregnant by the Holy Spirit. (Lu. 1:26ff. And later after Jesus was crucified and buried in the tomb several of the women disciples went to the tomb early on that Sunday morning and they discovered that the great stone that had sealed the tomb was rolled away and it was empty. Luke 24:4ff says:

⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning **(A)** stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen!

And the angels even ministered to Jesus while he was here on earth. At the end of his 40 days of fasting, after the devil had tried to tempt him, the text says that “angels came and attended him.” (Matt. 4:11).

So angels, we see, are servants. They are created beings who are to serve Christians, and who even ministered to the Lord Jesus. But they have nowhere near the status and honor of the Lord Jesus.

The writer here lays out the case, clearly from the OT, to show the identity of the exalted Son of God, and compares his position with the function and purpose and service of angels.

- Jesus has a greater name: he is the Son. None of the angels are ever called sons.

- Jesus is to be worshipped by the angels: This shows he is deity and they are creatures.
- Angels are servants
- But the Son is God who sits upon the heavenly throne who rules in for ever in righteousness
- The Son is the Creator of all things while the angels are created beings.
- The Son will never change – all created things will change. Even angels can be changed if God so desires that they can fulfill his purposes for them.
- God never told any angel to sit at his right hand. But he did tell the Son to do this. Thus the Son rules over all things with the Father and holds the place of universal sovereignty. No angel was ever appointed to such a place.

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

In the form of a sermon, the writer issues a “therefore.” Because Jesus is so much greater than the angels, because the evidence of the Old Testament is so strong to show how great Jesus is, as well as what the purpose of angels is, we must do something. What is it? We must pay much closer attention to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Why? Because there is danger that we could drift away. He uses an illustration that would be familiar to people who live on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and were acquainted with the coming and going and traveling of ships back and forth. There were strong currents in the Mediterranean Sea and they would quickly carry a boat off in the direction of the current, unless the boat was anchored or unless the crew used sails and oars and rudder to direct the boat contrary to the prevailing current.

You see, there are always strong currents in the Sea of Life and the Sea of our Culture, and in the Sea of What Is Politically Correct. And these can carry a Christian off in the wrong direction if she or he is not anchored to the Gospel, anchored to the Word of God. The church, in fact, must remain on her guard, lest she be carried off by the strong tide and current of the prevailing cultural norms, rather than be governed and directed and enlightened by the Word of God.

² For since ^(A)the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and ^(B)every transgression or disobedience received a just ^(C)retribution,

So the law ministered through the intermediaries of angels was good. There was nothing wrong with it. It was the Word of the Lord. As the writer says here in verse 2, it was “reliable” and it was just because “every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution.”

The Law was the revelation of God for the people of that day and time. It was sufficient for that Age, yet it was a precursor of something greater and better and more perfect that was yet to come. The Law had a purpose for its time, but when Christ came, it became obsolete.

I remember in high school I used to type papers on an old fashioned typewriter, and to correct a mistake or move some text around was a very tedious process. When the word processing system that we commonly use on computers came in – my, what a revolution in ease of moving text around and making corrections. Who would want to go back to using an old fashioned typewriter? Even so the coming of Jesus Christ inaugurated a much better covenant, a much better way in which humankind relates to God and comes into relationship with him.

So the far superior has now come, the Messiah, the Son of God himself has appeared in human history and lived and walked among us, and purchased our redemption....

³ **(D)how shall we escape if we (E)neglect such a great salvation? It was (E)declared at first by the Lord, and it was (G)attested to us (H)by those who heard,**

So the writer continues on the style of first century preaching. First, he had laid out the case for the superiority of Jesus, using the OT as his basis of argument. Then he had issued the imperative: what the listeners needed to do based on this greater revelation. Then he presents a rhetorical question, ³ **(D)how shall we escape if we (E)neglect such a great salvation?** They expected answer is...what? We cannot escape, we cannot escape the judgment of God.

Look at this word “neglect.” It is a great sin to neglect the great salvation that God has provided in his Son. It is a bad or worse as outright rejecting Christ’s provided salvation. Jesus, the Son of God, is so much greater than angels, he is a totally different level of being; he is God, the Son of God, the one worthy of worship, the King of the kingdom of God, the creator of all things and the one who holds the universe together, he is the One who purified his people from their sins – which of the angels ever did any of these things, or was worthy of any of this honor? Which angels? None of them, not Gabriel or Michael, or all 10,000 times 10,000 of them could every measure up to the glory and power and dominion and work and sacrifice of Jesus the Son of God. And yet you would neglect him and his great salvation and go back to holding angels in higher esteem and the revelation that they mediated in higher regard? That is foolish, that is ridiculous, to want to retreat from the greater to the lesser, to want to continue grasping onto the partial and incomplete when the whole and complete has arrived.

This great salvation was received from the very mouth and person of the Son of God himself: *It was (E)declared at first by the Lord...*

But ^(B)when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, ^(C)born ^(D)of woman, born ^(E)under the law, ⁵ ^(E)to redeem those who were under the law...

So the Son of God, incarnated deity, the Word of God become flesh, live and preached and taught and the people were amazed at his authority. For he spoke as the very authority of Yahweh himself for in him was found all the fullness of the deity in his body. He was fully God and fully man in one person. Not partially God or partially man but fully God and fully humankind in one person. This is the mystery of the incarnation. God was incarnate in human flesh. Verse 14 of Hebrews 2 says ⁴ *Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise ^(A)partook of the same things...*

When the NT uses the term “Lord” it is usually referring to the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. So Hebrews 2:3 is telling us that this great salvation was declared to mankind from the very mouth of the Messiah, the Son of God himself. God has come to us in the person of his Son and revealed fully his nature and will and the way to be saved through the gospel of Christ. How can we neglect such a great salvation that was hand-delivered to us by the Son of God himself as he came to our earth and walked among us.

Recently in my developmental reading class that I teach at the community college I have had my students begin reading the novel, *The Testament*, by John Grisham. Those that have started the novel have been captivated and one or two have pressed ahead several chapters from where I am requiring them to read because they cannot stop reading. Just imagine if the author himself were to visit our classroom – how much more stimulus that would be for them to read the novel.

Well, the author of creation and the author of redemption himself came and visited the people of ancient Israel. They heard from his very lips the Word of the Gospel, the truth of God. *When God pays you a personal visit, are you going to neglect him?*

And if that were not enough, this same gospel was communicated to these first century Christians by those who had heard him teach and who passed on his gospel to them. And if this is a reference to the apostles, then they had heard the gospel from those who had seen him and touched him and been taught by him after his resurrection from the dead.

So, it's like these Jewish Christians to whom the author is ministering this sermon, have the doubly strong witness of the gospel delivered to the Jewish people by the Messiah himself, and then by his chosen witnesses. How can you neglect such strong testimony? How can you neglect what God has so clearly revealed? How can you neglect the testimony of the sacred oracles of the Old Covenant revelation? All these witness point to the reality that Jesus of Nazareth is the promised, anointed Son of God.

⁴ (I) while God also bore witness (J) by signs and wonders and various miracles and by (K) gifts of the Holy Spirit (L) distributed according to his will.

And if the teaching of Jesus Christ with the authority of the Old Testament and the person of Yahweh behind it and permeating it and making it true and powerful were not enough – all of Christ’s teachings and his person were confirmed and verified by the very miracles that he performed, and that not only performed, but which continued in the ministry of the apostles by the power of the Holy Spirit.

So the writer is driving home his point: The ministry of the angels in mediating the Old Covenant was valid and good for its time in redemptive history, that revelation has been made obsolete and has been far surpassed by the revelation of God in the final prophet, in his Son.

God, who spoke in times past through many means and at different times, who even used angels in communicating his revelation to mankind, has now spoken to mankind through a much greater mediator than the created angels, he has spoken in his Son, the Son appointed, the Creator, the One worthy of worship, the unchangeable One, the One who rules at God’s right hand.

My Christian friends, do you see what God has done because he loves you? He has pulled out all the stops, there are “no holds barred,” he has spared no effort to bring you truth and revelation and redemption from your sins.

So pay close attention to what God has revealed and done in his Son. Do not neglect this Word of the Gospel. Do not neglect Jesus the Son of God. Do not drift away. Anchor your life in Christ, in his Word, in his church, and your ship will sail triumphantly through the rough seas of life and on that final day he will bring you safely into the harbor of His peace and presence. Amen.

APPLICATIONS:

- 1. Christians living in persecuted lands need this message of Hebrews .**
- 2. Role of angels in Islam and Mormonism – they were mediators of revelation. Paul said in Galatians 1 we should not accept any gospel, even if mediated by angels, that is opposed to his (the Biblical) gospel.**
- 3. In Rev. 5, for example, we see the angels worshipping Jesus. Are we, who are redeemed sinners (and angels can’t be saved as humans can), going to let the angels out-praise us?**

General Notes on overview:

Wm Lane

“...Alternating with the encouragement provided by the preacher’s presentation of the high priestly ministry of the Son of God are a series of warnings...”

- 1) addressing the neglect of the message of Salvation (2:1-4)
- 2) the sin of unbelief (3:7-4:11)
- 3) the denial of Christ (5:11-6:20)
- 4) The failure to continue in the Christian life (10:19-39)
- 5) The refusal of the God who is speaking (12:14-29).