

**Hebrews 1****Lesson 1****Christ Is Superior To Prophets And Angels****Outline****I. Christ is Superior to Prophets** (vv. 1-3)

- A. *In time past God spoke by prophets* (v. 1)
- B. *Now God speaks by his Son* (vv. 2-3)
  1. Who is heir of all things (v. 2)
  2. Through whom he made the worlds (v. 2)
  3. Is the brightness of his glory (v. 3)
  4. Express image of his person (v. 3)
  5. Upholds all things by the word of his power (v. 3)
  6. Purged our sins by himself (v. 3)
  7. Sat down at right hand of God (v. 3)

**II. Christ is Superior to Angels** (vv. 4-14)

- A. *Has a more excellent name* (vv. 4-5)
- B. *Angels worship him* (v. 6)
- C. *Christ is king—angels are just ministers* (vv. 7-9)
  1. Angels are ministers (v. 7)
  2. God called him "God" and gave him a kingdom (vv. 8-9)
  3. Anointed of God (v. 9)
- D. *Christ is the unchanging creator* (vv. 10-12)
  1. He created the world (v. 10)
  2. Heavens, earth and works will perish (vv. 11-12)
  3. The Son remains (v. 11-12)
- E. *Christ is Lord—angels were ministering spirits* (vv. 13-14)

**Key Verse that Summarizes the Chapter****Hebrews 1:4**

Having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

In this chapter we shall see Christ is superior to prophets and Angels. The writer launches immediately into his subject without any introduction or personal remarks. His first sentence says that God speaks to us by his Son (v. 2). The rest of the book develops that point.

### **Christ is Superior to Prophets (vv. 1-3)**

To the Jew, the prophets were held in high esteem. Thus, if Christ is better than the prophets, he is the one to whom we must give heed.

*In time past God spoke by prophets* (v. 1). A prophet is one who is a spokesman for another (Exo. 4:16; 7:1; John 4:19). Thus, prophets of God declared his message to the fathers (the Hebrew's ancestors) in ancient times.<sup>1</sup> The message was given at "various times" (in many parts, fragmentary). The revelation of his will was not given all at once. "One prophet has one; another has another element of the truth to proclaim."<sup>2</sup>

God revealed his will in "various ways" (in many ways). At times God used visions and dreams (Num. 12:6), face to face communication (Num. 12:8), and even a donkey (Num. 22:25-31).<sup>3</sup>

This first verse argues for the comparative imperfection of the Old Testament for it was incomplete.

*Now God speaks by his Son* (vv. 2-3). The "last days" refer to the last dispensation. We are now living in the last days (Acts 2:17; 2 Tim. 3:1; Heb. 1:2; 2 Pet. 3:3).<sup>4</sup> Now God's spokesman is more than a prophet, he is God's only Son. This affirms two things: (1) he is deity (cf. John 5:17-18), and (2) he is God's final spokesman. Being God's Son, he is superior to prophets. The author list seven things that are true of the Son that are not true of any prophet.

**1. He is heir of all things (v. 2).** Because he is God's Son, he is heir. This "is most likely a title of dignity, and shows that Jesus has the supreme place in all the mighty universe."<sup>5</sup> He has the nations as an inheritance (Psa. 2:8). He has all authority (Matt. 28:18). When he was raised and ascended he had all power and dominion (Eph. 1:20-22; Acts 2:36).

**2. He is the one through whom he made the worlds (v. 2).** He is the agent through whom God created the universe (John 1:2-3, 10; Col. 1:15-16; 1 Cor. 8:6; Heb. 11:3).

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1 From the time of the call of Abraham to Malachi.

2 M. R. Vincent, *Vincent's Word Studies of the New Testament*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft.

3 Vincent argues, "This refers to the difference of the various revelations in contents and form. Not the different ways in which God imparted his revelations to the prophets, but the different ways in which he spoke by the prophets to the fathers: in one way through Moses, in another through Elijah, in others through Isaiah, Ezekiel, etc." (*ibid.*).

4 The last days do not refer to a time immediately before the end of time. Peter declared that he was living in the last days (Acts 2:16-17).

5 Gareth L. Reese, *Hebrews*, 3.

3. **He is the brightness of his glory (v. 3).** He is the radiance (NASV, NIV) of the glory of God. As the radiance of the sun is to the sun, so Christ is to the Father. All the glory of the sun is seen in its brightness. So the glory of God is seen in Christ (cf. John 14:7-9). "He reflects the glory of God" (RSV).
4. **He is the express image of his Person (v. 3).** "Person" refers to God's essential being. The Son of God is "the exact representation of his being" (NIV, "nature" NASV) or "the very image of his substance" (ASV). The principle here is like that of a rubber stamp and the image that it makes. Nothing is more like the original stamp than the image that it makes on the paper. The RSV renders this, "bears the very stamp of his nature." No one (not even the prophets) could more perfectly represent the Father than the Son.
5. **He upholds all things by the word of his power (v. 3).** Not only was the Son involved in creating the world, but he upholds (sustains, maintains) the world by his word. Paul, said, "in Him all things consist" (Col. 1:17).
6. **He purged our sins by himself (v. 3).** "He made purification of sins" (ASV). He purified us from sin by himself. No prophet could do that.
7. **He sat down at the right hand of God (v. 3).** To sit at one's right hand is a position of highest honor and authority (1 Kings 2:19; Psa. 45:9; 80:17; Matt. 20:20-23; 26:64). Christ is sitting at the right hand of God (Acts 2:33; Eph. 1:20). Furthermore, this phrase emphasizes the finality of his redemptive work. His work is completed, and thus he sits down at the right hand of God.<sup>6</sup>

None of these seven things are true of any prophet!

### **Christ is Superior to Angels (vv. 4-14)**

Here the author introduces his use of the word "better"<sup>7</sup>. Christ is so much better than angels. Why are angels introduced here? The writer shows that Christ is not only superior to prophets, but to angels as well. Angels were viewed as the most exalted beings (outside of God). If Christ is better than angels, he then is better than prophets, Moses, Joshua, Aaron, etc. It is possible that "this Hebrew congregation in its desire to safeguard strict Jewish monotheism may have been tempted to assign Jesus a place in the angelic order."<sup>8</sup> The author lists five things that are true of the Son that are not true of angels.

*He has a more excellent name* (vv. 4-5). His excellent name is Son (evidence by the supporting quote from Psalm 2:7). No angel was ever called the Son of God. To make his point, the author quotes Psalm 2:7<sup>9</sup> and 2 Samuel 7:14<sup>10</sup> and asks "to which of the angels did He ever say" these things?

- 6 In contrast, under the Mosaic system, the priest stands daily offering sacrifices indicating that their work is never completed (Heb. 10:11).
- 7 The term "better" is used 13 times: 1:4; 6:9; 7:7, 19, 22; 8:6 (twice); 9:23; 10:34; 11:16, 35, 40; 12:24).
- 8 Daniel H. King, Sr, *The Book of Hebrews*, Truth Commentaries, 61.
- 9 The same passage was quoted in Paul's sermon in Acts 13:33-34 where he applied it to the resurrection of Christ.
- 10 This passage obviously referred to Solomon. Milligan argues that it has a double reference. King argues that it has an indirect reference to the descendants of Solomon which includes the Christ.

*Angels worship him* (v. 6). The word “again” does not suggest that the firstborn is being brought again into the world (as worded in NKJV, ASV). Rather, it is used to introduce another reference from the Old Testament (as worded in KJV, ESV, RSV, NIV).<sup>11</sup>

What does bringing the “firstborn” into the world mean? “The meaning of the phrase, ‘when he bringeth in,’ therefore, I take to be, when he introduces him to people; when he makes him known to the world—to wit, by the declaration which he proceeds immediately to quote. ‘The first-begotten.’ Christ is called the ‘first-begotten,’ with reference to his resurrection from the dead, in Rev. 1, 5, and Col 1:18. It is probable here, however, that the word is used, like the word ‘first-born,’ or ‘first-begotten’ among the Hebrews, by way of eminence.”<sup>12</sup>

Where is the quotation that says, “Let all the angels of God worship him?” Some think it is Psalm 97:7, but the text doesn’t read exactly like that. It is more probable that it is a quotation from Deuteronomy 32:43 where the Septuagint (LXX) says, “Rejoice ye heavens with him; and let all the angels of God worship him. Let the nations rejoice with his people, and let all the sons of God be strong in him, for he has avenged the blood of his sons.”<sup>13</sup> While there are some difficulties with the verse, the point is that angels worship him. Thus, he is superior to angels.

*Christ is king—angels are just ministers* (vv. 7-9). Here use is made of two Psalms to contrast the Son as God and King to the angels as mere servants.

**1. Angels are ministers (v. 7).** The author quotes Psalm 104:4 where angels were called spirits (winds ASV), ministers and flames of fire. The point is that angels serve as God’s ministers at his beck and call. “The passage ‘might’ be translated, ‘Who maketh his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire;’ that is, ‘who makes his angels like the winds, or as swift as the winds, and his ministers as rapid, as terrible, and as resistless as the lightning.’”<sup>14</sup> Thus, angels are instruments that God uses to carry out his purpose just as wind and flames of fire.

**2. God called him “God” and gave him a kingdom (vv. 8-9).** The wording of Psalm 45:6-7 is applied to the Son. God the Father called the Son “God.” This affirms his deity. The Son was given a throne and kingdom established on righteousness.

**3. Anointed of God (v. 9).** The Father anointed the Son with the oil of gladness. The anointing here “seems to have reference to his glorification in heaven.”<sup>15</sup> This anointing was more or above his companions (the angels). Thus, he is superior.

*Christ is the unchanging creator* (vv. 10-12). The point here is that, unlike angels, Christ is the creator of the world, and thus continues while the creation wears out and will perish. Psalm 102:25-27 is quoted to make this point.

11 The author used the word “again” in similar fashion in 2:13; 10:30.

12 Albert Barnes, *Barnes’ Notes*, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft.

13 As quoted by Barnes.

14 Albert Barnes, *ibid.*

15 King, *ibid.*, 71.

- 1. He created the world (v. 10).** Here the Father refers to the Son as Lord and declares that he created the heavens and the earth.
- 2. Heavens, earth and the works will perish (vv. 11-12).** The creation will perish (v.11), grow old (v. 11), be folded up (v. 12) and be changed (v. 12). The material universe is wearing out<sup>16</sup> (like a garment does) and will eventually be destroyed (2 Pet. 3:10).
- 3. The Son remains (vv. 11-12).** In contrast, the Son remains (v. 11), his years will not fail (v. 12). He is eternal.

*Christ is Lord—angels are ministering spirits* (vv. 13-14). The quotation here is from Psalm 110:1. Christ is told by the Father to sit at his right hand (be Lord and ruler) until his enemies are a footstool.<sup>17</sup> God never instructed an angel to sit at his right hand. In contrast, the angels are ministering spirits whom God uses to minister to his people.<sup>18</sup> The point is that Christ is Lord (sitting at God’s right hand) while angels are mere servants.

None of these five things are true of any angel!

Use of the Old Testament in this Chapter	
Verse in Chapter 1	Old Testament Reference
v. 5	Psalm 2:7
v. 5	2 Sam. 7:14
v. 6	Deut. 32:43 (LXX)
v. 7	Psalm 104:4
v. 8	Psalm 45:6-7
vv. 10-12	Psalm 102:25-27
v. 13	Psalm 110:1

<sup>16</sup> These verses affirm that the world is wearing out and deteriorating. This agrees with the Second Law of Thermodynamics. Evolution must have the world constantly building itself up.

<sup>17</sup> This refers to a conqueror putting his feet on the neck of his defeated enemy (Josh. 10:22-25).

<sup>18</sup> This verse tells us more about what angels *are* than what they *do*. Angels are active today (ministering to Christians). However, exactly what they do and how, we don’t know.

## Questions

1. Why is it important for the Hebrew writer to show Christ is so much better than prophets and angels?
2. What is meant by God speaking in "various times" and in "various ways"?
3. When are the last days and how do we know?
4. What does it mean that Christ is the brightness of the glory of God?
5. What does it mean that Christ is the image of the person of God?
6. What is meant by Christ upholding all things by the word of his power?
7. What five points are made that show Christ is superior to angels?
8. What evidence does this chapter give that Jesus is deity?
9. Why would the writer need to quote from so many Old Testament passages?
10. What do angels do for Christians today?