

Hebrews 1:4-14 “Christ, Superior to Angels”

It is true that belief in angels is a part of our modern culture, but it is not the intent of the author of Hebrews to speak to our modern culture about angels. Learning about angels can be a lot of fun and helpful, but we will not spend our time this evening studying angels outside of their relevance to our text. I have included a portion of John MacArthur’s sermon notes on this text that delves into Angelology for your own entertainment.

Before we can understand the relevance angels have to our author’s intent, we need to first remind ourselves of that intent. The author of Hebrews is writing to a Jewish audience that consist of mostly believers, some non-believers, and a group that is perhaps on the fence, yet they have been exposed adequately to the gospel. Many within this group have been returning to their Jewish roots of Judaism, while many others are being tempted to do the same. The author is seeking to dissuade their return to the Old Covenant religion because Christ has come and fulfilled it, making it obsolete. The author uses arguments of comparison to accomplish this throughout the letter. He compares the covenants and their mediators to prove that the New Covenant mediated by Jesus is the superior and therefore the only one that offers true salvation.

Here is a list of the things we do need to know regarding angels insofar as they relate to the author’s purpose for writing this passage.

- We primarily need to know what his Jewish audience believed about angels
- They had a distorted view of angels that was loosely based on Scripture and embellished by Rabbinic tradition
- They believed angels were the highest beings next to God, which does have some biblical basis as angels are higher than man, yet lower than the Son of God
- They believed angels were the appointed deliverers of God’s Word to man and the instruments God used to work out his will on earth.
- They believed angels acted as God’s counsel and God did nothing without consulting them (eg. Gen. 1:26 “Let us make man in our image”)
- Perhaps most relevant to our text this evening is the belief that angels mediated the Old Covenant between God and Israel. They also believed

angels delivered the Mosaic Law to them (Acts 7:53 you who received the law as delivered by angels; and Gal. 3:19 the law was “put in place through angels).

- The inflated view of angels led some to even worship angels (Col. 2:18 Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels...) John was even tempted at one point to worship an angel (Rev. 19:10 *Then I fell down at his feet to worship him, but he said to me, “You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with you and your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God.” For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*)

It is upon this backdrop that the author of Hebrews and the Holy Spirit is putting on display the superiority of Jesus over the angels as mediator and the New Covenant that he inaugurated over the Old. Because of the unbiblical views of angels his audience held, the author uses Scripture to make his points.

1. The Son verses the Servants (v. 4-5)

⁴having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs. ⁵For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”? Or again, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”?

The first argument begins with an argument of status. Remember how the Jews elevated the angels to be the highest beings under God. Both sides in this argument would claim to be biblical. (Although, it is important to note I am not claiming the author of Hebrews was using the actual New Testament. It was not yet written). For a time, in so much as humanity was concerned their view was biblically accurate. Psalm 8:4-5 says, *“what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? ⁵Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor.”* We do not have to look far to see who this author believes was made a little lower than the angels, along with mankind. Look in chapter 2:5-9.

However, there was a particular time in history where God made it clear that this changed. Everything changed on earth and in the eyes of man when God

declared the title of Jesus was the one and only Son of God. This explains the confusing chronology of this text. At first glance it seems that God is saying Jesus “inherited” this sonship and became the Begotten Son, as though it was not eternally true of him. We need to keep in mind the particular argument being set forth by the author. It is a biblical argument and the biblical evidence points to an actual Divine recognition of Jesus’ sonship in time and on earth.

Some Possibilities:

- It could be a reference to the angel Gabriel’s announcement of the virgin birth to Mary (Luke 1:32 *He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David*)
- Or God’s audible proclamation at Jesus’ baptism – Matt. 3:17 *and behold, a voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.”* Or, the same at the Transfiguration – Matt. 17:5 *He was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my beloved Son,^[a] with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.”*
- I am most convinced it was at and through the resurrection that Jesus was officially declared the Son of God (Rom. 1:1-4 *Paul, a servant^[a] of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,² which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures,³ concerning his Son, who was descended from David^[b] according to the flesh⁴ and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord,).* This would have marked the ending of the period when Jesus was made a little lower than the heavenly beings (Ps. 8) and exalted to the right hand of the Father.

Regardless of which one you find most convincing, there is no denying that God attested to the world, Jesus of Nazareth as being His Only Begotten Son confirming his status as that above the angels.

2. The Worshiped One verses the Worshippers (v. 6)

⁶And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him.”

The second argument is based on the fact that the angels are commanded to worship Jesus. To make this argument the author uses Psalm 97:7 and/or Deuteronomy 32:43, both of which include his argument, "Let all angles worship Him". (Both passages used the word "gods" for angels). The author is responsible for the opening statement, "When he brings the firstborn into the world." This could be a reference to the incarnation when on that first Christmas the heavenly hosts praised God and said, "Glory to God in the highest," (Luke 2:14). Even beyond the first advent, we know the angles continue to worship Jesus eternally (Rev. 5:5-6). The reference to Jesus as the firstborn is a reference to status among the created realm and not to his place in creation. F.F. Bruce explains, "He is called firstborn because he exists before all creation and because all creation is his heritage."

To put it simply, the one worshipped is superior to the ones worshipping. Christ is the object of the angel's worship, therefore he is superior.

3. The King versus His Servants (v. 7-9)

⁷Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels (messengers) winds, and his ministers a flame of fire." ⁸But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. ⁹You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions."

The author of Hebrews quotes from Psalm 104:4 to establish the angels as servants who belong to the Lord. Notice he says, "his servants". His servants are messengers and ministers. We see angels as messengers all throughout the Scriptures. We are told in verse 14 of this chapter that the primary purpose of angels is to minister for the sake of all who will inherit salvation. Angels do the bidding of Jesus who is the author and finisher of our faith. Angels do what he commands them and has equipped them to do. All angels who refused to serve Christ are fallen angels and under his condemnation.

On the other hand, Jesus is the King reigning on the throne, ruling his kingdom with the scepter of uprightness. He is the King who loves righteousness and hates wickedness and has received the highest anointing from God the

Father, an anointing that surpasses that of all his companions, which is a reference to angels. This is all a quote from Psalm 45:6-7.

4. The Creator Verses the Created (v. 10-12)

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

This passage does not make it easy to determine the exact nature of the author's argument but there are a few likely possibilities. One being the creative attribute ascribed to Jesus, who would be responsible for creating the angels. This would certainly make him superior to the angels, who are created beings. Another possibility is the eternal nature of Jesus as opposed to the temporal nature of the angels. Though angels are eternal in that they do not die, they are temporal because they were created. There was a time when they did not exist.

5. The Superior Destiny (v. 13-14)

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

No angel was ever promised a place at the right hand of the Father, a place of honor and authority. No angel was ever promised they would personally reign over their defeated enemies. No angel was ever told that all things would be in subjection to them. Philippians 2:9-11 says, "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." It is addressed to Jesus.

As pointed out already the primary purpose of angels are to minister to the elect who would inherit salvation. They certainly hold a high and honorable position and have an incredible purpose as the Lord's ministers, but ultimately that is all they are. The author of Hebrews wants desperately for his hearers to

see that trusting in the angels as mediators of the Old Covenant is futile. He wants them to know for sure *“there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”* (1 Tim. 2:5).

Conclusion:

It is difficult to draw a direct parallel to our modern situation but there are great doctrines to learn and a general application we can draw. It is vanity to trust in anything other than Jesus for salvation. He is superior not only to angels but to anything or anyone else in all creation. He holds the highest position in all of creation as the Only Begotten Son. He is the only one worthy of worship and a day will come when everything in existence will bow down and worship him. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords and everyone else is in subjection to him. All things were created through him and therefore he is the only uncreated one. Everything culminates in his sovereign reign over all things and all his enemies will be put into subjection under his feet. He will possess the ultimate victory. What else could you put your trust in for salvation?

“Angelology” Just For Fun

The following has been taken from John MacArthur’s sermon Hebrews 1:4-6 titled *Jesus Christ, Superior to Angels Part One* (<https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1602/jesus-christ-superior-to-angels-part-1>).

Angels are spirit beings, and Jesus said that a spirit does not have flesh and bones. Consequently, angels do not have flesh and bones like humans. They do have some sort of a body. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 15 that there are bodies terrestrial, and there are bodies celestial; that is, there are bodies of the earth, and there are bodies of the heavens.

Angels have some kind of form. They are even capable of appearing in a human form. In [Hebrews 13:2](#), the Bible says be careful how you treat strangers or you might be entertaining angels unawares. They can take on a form that is human, or decidedly like a human. They also appear - for example, in Matthew chapter 28, in verses 3 and 4 - to have a form. Speaking of an angel, at Christ’s resurrection - the one who was there when the stone was rolled away - it says, “His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow, and for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men” - a dazzling kind of brilliant, blazing glory.

Now, when we say that angels are spirits, we do not necessarily mean that they have no form. They have a form that is celestial, and can manifest itself as a human, or in another way. In the Old Testament, we even have the saints wrestling with angels. Now, angels were all created simultaneously. According to [Colossians 1:16-17](#), we believe that inference is made. Angels are unable to procreate. They are not man and wife, and having little angels. Only men and women have little angels, who grow up to be anything but. There were no angels, then, added to the original batch.

God made them. He made them all uniquely as single identities; they do not cohabitate. [Matthew 22:28-30](#) indicates that to us. So, they were all made at once. They do not procreate. The number of angels has not changed one angel since they were originally created. Though a great number of them have fallen, they still exist as they were created. They are not subject to death. Scripture nowhere indicates that they die. Scripture nowhere indicates that they are in any way able to be made extinct. They do not decrease, and they do not increase.

Each angel, then, is a direct creation of God, standing in immediate personal relationship to God the creator, who made him. Now, the Old Testament assumes the existence of angels. There are 108 references in the Old Testament to angels, and 165 in the New Testament, so there's no doubt about the fact that angels exist, and that the Old Testament saints were well aware of it is also fact. Now, angels render intelligent worship to God and service to God; that's why they were created. They were created as a special spirit-being group to render service to God of a special nature.

Angels are intelligent. They can render intelligent service and worship to God. They are also emotional. The Bible talks about angels rejoicing when sinners are saved. They are capable of emotion. Angels can even speak, according to [Galatians 1:8](#), where the apostle Paul says, "Though we, or an angel of heaven, preach any other gospel unto you." They can speak. Angels also, according to [Daniel 9:21](#), have incredible speed. Sometimes they are pictured with wings, aren't they? Sometimes with as many as six wings.

Now, according to Mark, chapter 13, verse 32, and to [Jude 6](#), they have a special abode in the heavens. They dwell in all of the heavens, and we know in the Bible that the heaven where God lives is called which heaven? The third heaven. That's the heaven where God is. The second heaven is the spatial infinite heavens, the first heaven is that just about the earth. They dwell in all of those heavens. People say, "Are there beings in other parts of the universe?" All over the universe, but not with little things out of their head, flying around in little spaceships.

There are angelic beings inhabiting the universe. They are countless ages older than men, and there are trillions and trillions, and whatever and whatever, of them, evidently. And even after numberless hosts of them fell with Satan, there are still numberless holy angels left. For example, in [Daniel 7:10](#), Daniel said "thousand thousands were ministering unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand were standing before Him." That's just more and more. In Revelation, chapter 5, it says in verse 11, "The number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands."

Just take ten thousand times ten thousand, and just keep adding thousands of zeroes - there are a lot of angels. You say, "How many are there?" I'll tell you. There are exactly enough to get the work done. There is not one loafing angel. They are more powerful than men, and men must call on divine power to deal

with them, especially fallen ones. The Bible tells us - as we've studied in Ephesians chapter 6 - be strong in the Lord and the power of His might, for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against angels, fallen angels.

They are highly organized, and they are divided into ranks. Very, very complex organization; some of them are thrones, some of them are dominions, some of them principalities, some of them powers, and some of them are called authorities. There are cherubim, seraphim, and living creatures. Some have names: Lucifer, Michael, and Gabriel. Michael is the head of the armies of heaven, and Gabriel is called the mighty one. They are seen in Scripture as spectators at all redemptive events. They minister to God, and they do His bidding.

They ministered to Christ in His humiliation. Remember, at the conclusion of His temptation, the Bible says, "and angels came and ministered unto Him." They ministered to the saved. How? The Bible says that they watch the church, and they watch the preacher. They also aid the church by answering prayer, delivering from danger, encouraging Christians, and protecting children. They minister to the unsaved also, by announcing judgment and afflicting it - judgment angels. Now, that is a brief course in angelology.