

**Hebrews 1**  
**February 14, 2016**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

DEB: Left Column – put “Superiority of Christ” at the BOTTOM

I want you to put yourselves in the shoes of those who don’t know Christ as their Lord and Savior. Or perhaps all you have to remember were the days when you were still spiritually lost. When people don’t place their faith in Christ, they are placing it in “something.”

Q: [DEB – Point to “Superiority of Christ” at the bottom of the list] What are examples of where spiritually lost individuals place their faith? What are they really trusting? [Record answers above the line; e.g. careers, themselves, etc]

Q: [DEB – Go to Middle Column and point to “Superiority of Christ” at the top of the list] Now I want you to reflect on your own decision to become a Christ-follower. When you made your decision to place your faith in Christ, what were the things you understood about Christ that made Him “superior” to anything or anyone else you could have trusted? [Let people build the list]

I am probably preaching to the choir, but I think all of us know that we were created for the purpose of having a love relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Until that relationship is formed, there is a void that people try to fill with a variety of different things. You have already identified a handful of them on the board. You and I were called to “go and make disciples,” and we need to be aware of how people are trying to find their significance and security APART from Christ, and then be able to help them segue over to finding their significance and security IN the superiority of Christ.

**Transition:** We are beginning a new study in the book of Hebrews. We still don’t know who wrote this book! If you have a study Bible, you will have as much information as I do as to the various hypotheses as to who wrote Hebrews. All we can conclude is “Only God knows who wrote this, and He included it in the canon of Scripture.” We do have an educated “guess” of the intended audience, who would be the Jewish Christians. Why? The title of the book is “To the Hebrews,” there are references to the prophets and angels ministering to Israel, and there are citations concerning the Levitical worship.

Though the author will remain a mystery, here’s what we do know about the author:

- He uses the word *better* thirteen times in this book to show the superiority of Jesus Christ and His salvation over the Hebrew system of religion.
- Another word that is repeated in this book is *perfect*; in the original Greek it is used fourteen times. It means a perfect standing before God. This perfection could never be accomplished by the levitical priesthood (Heb. 7:11) or by the Law (Heb. 7:19), nor could the blood of animal sacrifices achieve it (Heb. 10:1).

- *Eternal* is a third word that is important to the message of Hebrews. Christ is the “author of eternal salvation” (Heb. 5:9). Through His death, He “obtained eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:12) and He shares with believers “the promise of eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15). His throne is forever (Heb. 1:8) and He is a priest forever (Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 21). “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

When you combine these three important words, you discover that Jesus Christ and the Christian life He gives us are *better* because these blessings are *eternal* and they give us a *perfect* standing before God.

In order to appreciate this new study, we have to understand why the writer focused on the superiority of Christ, which is a major theme throughout this epistle:

We need to ask, “Why did the writer ask his readers to evaluate their faith and what Jesus Christ had to offer them?” Answer: Because they were going through difficult times and were being tempted to go back to the Jewish religion. The temple was still standing when this book was written, and all the priestly ceremonies were still being carried on daily. How easy it would have been for these Jewish believers to escape persecution by going back into the old Mosaic system which they had known before. The writer will contrast the Old Testament system of Law with the New Testament ministry of grace. He will make it clear that the Jewish religious system was temporary and that it could not bring in the eternal “better things” that are found in Jesus Christ.

These people were “second generation believers,” having been won to Christ by those who had known Jesus Christ during His ministry on earth (Heb. 2:3). They were true believers (Heb. 3:1) and not mere professors. They had been persecuted because of their faith (Heb. 10:32–34; 12:4; 13:13–14), and yet they had faithfully ministered to the needs of others who had suffered (Heb. 6:10). But they were being seduced by teachers of false doctrine (Heb. 13:9), and they were in danger of forgetting the true Word that their first leaders, now dead, had taught them (Heb. 13:7).

The tragic thing about these believers is that they were at a standstill spiritually and in danger of going backward (Heb. 5:12ff). Some of them had even forsaken the regular worship services (Heb. 10:25) and were not making spiritual progress (Heb. 6:1). In the Christian life, if you do not go forward, you go backward; there is no permanent standing still. The mystery author is challenging his readers with “*How can you go back into your former religion? Just take time to evaluate what you have in Jesus Christ. He is better than anything you ever had under the Law.*”

**PROPOSITION:** As we study Chapter 1 today, please consider that *All of us CAN share our faith more effectively BY understanding the many WAYS Christ is superior to any other being that ever existed.* Let’s begin and find the WAYS Christ is superior to all.

**BOOK (NIV 1984):**

V.1:

- In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,

V.2:

- but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

V.3:

- The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q v.1: How did God speak to His people (forefathers) during the OT times? [Through prophets at many times and in various ways.]

Q v.2: The Scripture uses the phrase “in these last days”...what time period is the author describing? [The first advent of Christ to the second advent of Christ]

Q v.2: During these “last days,” how did God choose to speak to us? [Through His Son, Jesus]

Q v.2: What do we learn about Jesus’s involvement with creation? [The universe was created through Him. He is the Creator of the universe!]

- X-REF John 1:1-5
- X-REF Col 1:17

Observation: Jesus is appointed “heir of all things.” Doesn’t it make sense that since He created the universe that He gets to keep what He makes?! And being heir also anticipates Christ’s future reign when He returns again.

Q v.3a: How does the writer describe Jesus? [“The radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being.”]

- Notice that **the author makes clear that Jesus Christ is God**. His description could never be applied to mortal man. “Brightness of His glory” refers to the Shekinah glory of God that dwelt in the tabernacle and temple. (See Ex. 40:34–38 and 1 Kings 8:10. The word *SHEKINAH* is a transliteration of a Hebrew word that means “to dwell.”) ***Christ is to the Father what the rays of the sun are to the sun. He is the radiance of God’s glory. As it is impossible to separate the rays from the sun, it is also impossible to separate Christ’s glory from the nature of God.***
- Jesus Christ is “the exact representation of the very substance of God” (X-Ref Col. 2:9). Only Jesus could honestly say, “He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). When you see Christ, you see the glory of God (John 1:14).

Q v.3b: How does Jesus “sustain all things?” [By His powerful word]

Q v.3c: In the last part of v.3, what else do we learn about Jesus? [He provided purification for sins and then sat down at the right hand of God in heaven.]

- What is the author referencing when he speaks of the “purification for sins?” [Christ’s death on a cross for the sins of the world]
- Once Christ was crucified on the cross, what happened three days later such that he could “sit at the right hand of God?” [He conquered death – Up from the grave He arose – He was resurrected!!]

Q: Before we look at the writer’s comparison of Jesus to angels, let’s identify the WAYS that Christ is superior just based on the first three verses? [Go to DEB and record in Right Column]

- Superior over the Prophets because of WHO Jesus is:
  - No prophet was ever God
  - No prophet could claim to be the exact representation of God’s being
  - No prophet could claim to be the “radiance of God’s glory”
- Superior over the Prophets because of WHAT Jesus did:
  - No prophet created our universe (Christ is a Creator)
  - No prophet has the ability to “sustain all things” by the “power of his word.”
  - No prophet had the redemptive power to purify all of creation of sin (Christ is Priest)
  - No prophet was resurrected
  - No prophet “sits at the right hand of God” (Christ is King)

**[Read Heb 1:4-14]**

V.4:

- So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

V.5:

- For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father”? Or again, “I will be his Father, and he will be my Son”?

V.6:

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

V.7:

- In speaking of the angels he says, “He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire.”

V.8:

- But about the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last forever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom.

V.9:

- You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.”

V.10:

- He also says, “In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.

V.11:

- They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment.

V.12:

- You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.”

V.13:

- To which of the angels did God ever say, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”?

V.14:

- Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

**Transition:** Angels were most important in the Jewish religion, primarily because thousands of angels assisted in the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. This fact is stated in Deuteronomy 33:2; Psalm 68:17; Acts 7:53; and Galatians 3:19. Since the theme of Hebrews is the superiority of Christ and His salvation to the Law of Moses, the writer would have to deal with the important subject of angels. We will see seven quotations from the Old Testament as proof of His superiority.

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Observation v.4: It might throw some of you to all of sudden be reading that Christ is superior to angels when we have been reading about his superiority over prophets. The point the writer is making is that by being the Creator, a Priest, and a King, Christ has attained an eminence far beyond anything angels can claim.

Q v.4: What is the name Christ inherited that was superior to the angels? [The “more excellent name” that Jesus possesses is “Son.” While the angels *collectively* may be termed “the sons of God” (Job 1:6), no angel would be given this title *individually*. It belongs uniquely to our Lord Jesus Christ.]

Observation v.5: The writer provides two OT references pointing to Christ’s superiority as being God’s only Son.

Q v.6: Who is to worship Christ? [The angels - The term “firstborn” in the Bible does not always mean “born first.” The title is one of rank and honor, for the firstborn receives the inheritance and the special blessing. Christ is the “Firstborn of all creation” (Col. 1:15, NASB) because He created all things]

Q v.7: What do you think the author means when he says, “He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire?” [This is a quotation from Psalm 104:4. The Hebrew and Greek words for “spirit” are also translated “wind.” Angels are created spirits; they have no bodies, though they can assume human forms when ministering on earth. Angels sometimes served our Lord when He was on earth (Matt. 4:11; Luke 22:43), and they serve Him and us now.]

Q v.8-9: How long will Jesus’s throne last? [For ever and ever! - “Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever.” Angels minister *before* the throne; they do not *sit* on the throne. One of the main teachings of Psalm 110 is that Jesus Christ, God’s Anointed (Messiah, Christ), is now enthroned in glory.]

Q v.10-12: Who shows up again as having been a part of the creation of the universe? [The Lord! He is the eternal Creator. This long quotation comes from Psalm 102:25–27.] Have any angels created anything? [No!]

Q v.12: What do you think is meant when it says, “You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed.” [The angels did not found the earth, for they too are a part of creation. Jesus Christ is the Creator, and one day He will do away with the old creation and bring in a new creation. Creation is like an old garment which will one day be discarded in favor of a new one.]

Q v.12b: What is an attribute of Christ that we learn at the end of v.12? [Christ is immutable. He’s unchanging and will remain the same. He’s eternal as His years will “never end.”]

Observation v.13-14: The writer quotes Psalm 110:1. The fact that Jesus Christ is now at the Father’s right hand (the place of honor) is mentioned many times in the New Testament (see Matt. 22:43–44; 26:64; Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33–34; Rom. 8:34; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22). Angels are the ministering spirits who serve the Lord seated on the throne. But they also minister to us who are the “heirs of salvation” through faith in Christ. The angels today are serving us!

Q: Let’s identify the WAYS that Christ is superior based on the verses we just covered? [Go to DEB and record]

- He’s the only who has the name “Son” from God the Father
- Christ is the “firstborn of all creation.”
- He’s superior over angels
- He’s God enthroned and anointed
- He is the eternal Creator
- He is unchanging

### **LOOK:**

The Epistle to the Hebrews exalts the person and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The first three verses set this high and holy theme which is maintained throughout the entire book. Their immediate purpose is to prove that Jesus Christ is superior to the prophets, men who were held in the highest esteem by the Jewish people.

Christ should be held in the highest esteem by us, and we need to present the superiority of Christ to those who are still trying to find the “best place” to place their faith! ***All of us can share our faith more effectively with the lost by understanding the WAYS Christ is truly superior over anything and everything that has ever been or ever will be created.*** With Easter around the corner, this would be an ideal time to consider having coffee with those who are seeking and searching. Invite them to this class to be a learner. Invite them to RCC to hear the gospel during the season of Lent and the weeks drawing us to the Easter celebration.

### **Close in Prayer**

### **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary* (Vol. 2, pp. 276–282). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

## **IS ANYBODY LISTENING?**

### *Hebrews 1:1–3*

A man from Leeds, England visited his doctor to have his hearing checked. The doctor removed the man's hearing aid, and the patient's hearing immediately improved! He had been wearing the device *in the wrong ear* for over 20 years!

I once asked a pastor friend, "Do you have a deaf ministry in your church?" He replied, "There are times when I think the whole church needs a deaf ministry—they just don't seem to hear me."

There is a difference between *listening* and really *hearing*, Jesus often cried, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!" This statement suggests that it takes more than physical ears to hear the voice of God. It also requires a receptive heart. "Today, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts" (Heb. 3:7–8).

Many people have avoided the Epistle to the Hebrews and, consequently, have robbed themselves of practical spiritual help. Some have avoided this book because they are "afraid of it." The "warnings" in Hebrews have made them uneasy. Others have avoided this book because they think it is "too difficult" for the average Bible student. To be sure, there are some profound truths in Hebrews, and no preacher or teacher would dare to claim that he knows them all! But the general message of the book is clear and there is no reason why you and I should not understand and profit from it.

Perhaps the best way to begin our study is to notice five characteristics of the Epistle to the Hebrews.

### **It Is a Book of Evaluation**

The word *better* is used thirteen times in this book as the writer shows the superiority of Jesus Christ and His salvation over the Hebrew system of religion. Christ is "better than the angels" (Heb. 1:4). He brought in "a better hope" (Heb. 7:19) because He is the Mediator of "a better covenant, which was established on better promises" (Heb. 8:6).

Another word that is repeated in this book is *perfect*; in the original Greek it is used fourteen times. It means a perfect standing before God. This perfection could never be accomplished by the levitical priesthood (Heb. 7:11) or by the Law (Heb. 7:19), nor could the blood of animal sacrifices achieve it (Heb. 10:1). Jesus Christ gave Himself as one offering for sin, and by this He has "perfected forever them that are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14).

So the writer is contrasting the Old Testament system of Law with the New Testament ministry of grace. He is making it clear that the Jewish religious system was temporary and that it could not bring in the eternal "better things" that are found in Jesus Christ.

*Eternal* is a third word that is important to the message of Hebrews. Christ is the "author of eternal salvation" (Heb. 5:9). Through His death, He "obtained eternal redemption" (Heb. 9:12) and He shares with believers "the promise of eternal inheritance" (Heb. 9:15). His throne is

forever (Heb. 1:8) and He is a priest forever (Heb. 5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 21). “Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8).

When you combine these three important words, you discover that Jesus Christ and the Christian life He gives us are *better* because these blessings are *eternal* and they give us a *perfect* standing before God. The religious system under the Mosaic Law was imperfect because it could not accomplish a once-for-all redemption that was eternal.

But why did the writer ask his readers to evaluate their faith and what Jesus Christ had to offer them? Because they were going through difficult times and were being tempted to go back to the Jewish religion. The temple was still standing when this book was written, and all the priestly ceremonies were still being carried on daily. How easy it would have been for these Jewish believers to escape persecution by going back into the old Mosaic system which they had known before.

These people were “second generation believers,” having been won to Christ by those who had known Jesus Christ during His ministry on earth (Heb. 2:3). They were true believers (Heb. 3:1) and not mere professors. They had been persecuted because of their faith (Heb. 10:32–34; 12:4; 13:13–14), and yet they had faithfully ministered to the needs of others who had suffered (Heb. 6:10). But they were being seduced by teachers of false doctrine (Heb. 13:9), and they were in danger of forgetting the true Word that their first leaders, now dead, had taught them (Heb. 13:7).

The tragic thing about these believers is that they were at a standstill spiritually and in danger of going backward (Heb. 5:12ff). Some of them had even forsaken the regular worship services (Heb. 10:25) and were not making spiritual progress (Heb. 6:1). In the Christian life, if you do not go forward, you go backward; there is no permanent standing still.

“How can you go back into your former religion?” the writer asked them. “Just take time to evaluate what you have in Jesus Christ. He is better than anything you ever had under the Law.”

The Book of Hebrews exalts the person and the work of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. When you realize all that you have in and through Him, you have no desire for anyone else or anything else!

## **It Is a Book of Exhortation**

The writer calls this epistle “the word of exhortation” (Heb. 13:22). The Greek word translated “exhortation” simply means “encouragement.” It is translated “comfort” in Romans 15:4, and “consolation” in 2 Corinthians 1:5–7; 7:7. This word is related to the Greek word translated “Comforter” in John 14:16, referring to the Holy Spirit. The Epistle to the Hebrews was not written to frighten people, but to encourage people. We are commanded to “encourage one another daily” (Heb. 3:13, NIV). It reminds us that we have “strong encouragement” in Jesus Christ (Heb. 6:18, NASB).

At this point we must answer the usual question: “But what about those five terrible warnings found in Hebrews?”

To begin with, these five passages are not really “warnings.” Three basic words are translated “warn” in the New Testament, and the only one used in Hebrews is translated “admonished” in Hebrews 8:5 (KJV, where it refers to Moses) and “spake” in Hebrews 12:25. Only in Hebrews 11:7 is it translated “warned,” where it refers to Noah “being warned of God.” I think that the best description of the five so-called warning passages is the one given in Hebrews 13:22—“exhortation” (KJV), or “encouragement” (BERK). This does not minimize the seriousness of these



five sections of the book, but it does help us grasp their purpose: to encourage us to trust God and heed His Word.

The Epistle to the Hebrews opens with an important declaration: “God ... has spoken to us in His Son” (Heb. 1:1–2, NASB). Near the close of the book, the writer states: “See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking” (Heb. 12:25, NASB). In other words, the theme of Hebrews seems to be: “God has spoken; we have His Word. What are we doing about it?”

With this truth in mind, we can now better understand the significance of those five “problem passages” in Hebrews. Each of these passages encourages us to heed God’s Word (“God ... has spoken”) by pointing out the sad spiritual consequences that result if we do not. Let me list these passages for you and explain their sequence in the Book of Hebrews. I think you will see how they all hang together and present one message: *heed God’s word*.

*Drifting* from the Word—2:1–4 (neglect)

*Doubting* the Word—3:7–4:13 (hard heart)

*Dullness* toward the Word—5:11–6:20 (sluggishness)

*Despising* the Word—10:26–39 (willfulness)

*Defying* the Word—12:14–29 (refusing to hear)

If we do not listen to God’s Word and really *hear* it, we will start to *drift*. Neglect always leads to drifting, in things material and physical as well as spiritual. As we drift from the Word, we start to *doubt* the Word; because *faith* comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17). We start to get hard hearts, and this leads to spiritual sluggishness which produces *dullness* toward the Word. We become “dull of hearing”—lazy listeners! This leads to a *despiteful* attitude toward the Word to the extent that we willfully *disobey* God; and this gradually develops into a *defiant* attitude—we almost “dare” God to do anything!

Now what does God do while this spiritual regression is going on? He keeps speaking to us, encouraging us to get back to the Word. If we fail to listen and obey, then He begins to chasten us. This chastening process is the theme of Hebrews 12, the climactic chapter in the epistle. “The Lord shall judge *His people*” (Heb. 10:30, italics mine). God does not allow His children to become “spoiled brats” by permitting them to willfully defy His Word. He always chastens in love.

These five exhortations are addressed to people who are truly born again. Their purpose is to get the readers to pay close attention to God’s Word. While there is some stern language in some of these passages, it is my understanding that none of these exhortations “threatens” the reader by suggesting that he may “lose his salvation.” If he persists in defying God’s Word, he may lose *his life* (“Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?”—Heb. 12:9). The inference is that if we do not submit, we might die. “There is a sin unto death” (1 John 5:16). But if the Epistle to the Hebrews teaches anything, it teaches the assurance of eternal life in a living High Priest who can never die (Heb. 7:22–28).

Some students try to explain away the “problem” of “losing your salvation” or “apostasy” by claiming that the readers were not truly born again, but were only “professors” of Christian faith. However, the way the writer addresses them would eliminate that approach; for he called them “holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling” (Heb. 3:1). He told them that they had a High Priest in heaven (Heb. 4:14), which he would not have written if they were lost. They had been “made partakers of the Holy Spirit” (Heb. 6:4). The admonitions in Hebrews 10:19–25 would be meaningless if addressed to unsaved people.

The Epistle to the Hebrews is a book of evaluation, proving that Jesus Christ is better than anything the Law of Moses has to offer. The epistle is also a book of exhortation, urging its readers to hear and heed the Word of God, lest they regress spiritually and experience the chastening hand of God.

### **It Is a Book of Examination**

As you study this book, you will find yourself asking: “What am I *really* trusting? Am I trusting the Word of God, or am I trusting the things of this world that are shaking and ready to fall away?”

This letter was written to believers at a strategic time in history. The temple was still standing and the sacrifices were still being offered. But in a few years, both the city and the temple would be destroyed. The Jewish nation would be scattered, and this would include Jewish believers in Jesus Christ. The ages were colliding! God was “shaking” the order of things (Heb. 12:25–29). He wanted His people to have their feet on the solid foundation of faith; He did not want them to trust in things that would vanish.

I believe that the church today is living in similar circumstances. Everything around us is shaking and changing. People are discovering that they have been depending on the “scaffolding” and not on the solid foundation. Even God’s people have gotten so caught up in this world’s system that their confidence is not in the Lord, but in money, buildings, programs, and other passing material things. As God continues to “shake” society, the scaffolding will fall away; and God’s people will discover that their only confidence must be in the Word of God.

God wants our hearts to be “established with grace” (Heb. 13:9). That word “established” is used, in one form or another, eight times in Hebrews. It means: “to be solidly grounded, to stand firm on your feet.” It carries the idea of strength, reliability, confirmation, permanence. This, I think, is the key message of Hebrews: “You can be secure while everything around you is falling apart!” We have a “kingdom which cannot be moved” (Heb. 12:28). God’s Word is steadfast (Heb. 2:2) and so is the hope we have in Him (Heb. 6:19).

Of course, there is no security for a person who has never trusted Jesus Christ as his own Saviour from sin. Nor is there security to those who have made a “lip profession” but whose lives do not give evidence of true salvation (Matt. 7:21–27; Titus 1:16). Christ saves “to the uttermost” (i.e., “eternally”) only those who have come to God through faith in Him (Heb. 7:25).

I like to tell congregations the story about the conductor who got on the train, began to take tickets, and told the first passenger whose ticket he took, “Sir, you’re on the wrong train.” When he looked at the next ticket, he told that passenger the same thing.

“But the brakeman told me to get on this train,” the passenger protested.

“I’ll double-check,” said the conductor. He did and discovered that *he* was on the wrong train!

I fear there are many people who have a false faith, who have not really heard and heeded God’s Word. Sometimes they are so busy telling everybody else what to do that they fail to examine their own situations. The Epistle to the Hebrews is a book of examination: it helps you discover where your faith really is.

### **It Is a Book of Expectation**

The focus in this book is on the future. The writer informs us that he is speaking about “the world to come” (Heb. 2:5), a time when believers will reign with Christ. Jesus Christ is “heir of

all things” (Heb. 1:2) and we share the “promise of eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15). Like the patriarchs lauded in Hebrews 11, we are looking for that future city of God (Heb. 11:10–16, 26).

Like these great men and women of faith, we today should be “strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb. 11:13). This is one reason why God is shaking everything around us. *He wants us to turn loose from the things of this world and stop depending on them.* He wants us to center our attention on the world to come. This does *not* mean that we become so heavenly minded that we’re no earthly good. Rather it means that we “hang loose” as far as this world is concerned, and start living for the eternal values of the world to come.

Abraham and Lot, his nephew, illustrate these two different attitudes (Gen. 13–14). Abraham was a wealthy man who could have lived in an expensive house in any location that he chose. But he was first of all God’s servant, a pilgrim and a stranger; and this meant living in tents. Lot chose to abandon the pilgrim life and move into the evil city of Sodom. Which of these two men had true security? It would appear that Lot was safer in the city than Abraham was in his tents on the plain. But Lot became a prisoner of war! And Abraham had to rescue him.

Instead of heeding God’s warning, Lot went back into the city; and when God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, Lot lost everything (Gen. 19). Lot was a saved man (2 Peter 2:7), but he trusted in the things of this world instead of trusting the Word of God. Lot forfeited the permanent because he depended on and lived for the immediate.

Martyred missionary Jim Elliot said it best: “He is no fool to give what he cannot keep, to gain what he cannot lose.”

You and I as God’s children have been promised a future reward. As with Abraham and Moses of old, the decisions we make today will determine the rewards tomorrow. More than this, our decisions should be motivated by the expectation of receiving rewards. Abraham obeyed God *because* “he looked for a city” (Heb. 11:10). Moses forsook the treasures and the pleasures of Egypt *because* “he had respect unto the recompense of the reward” (Heb. 11:26). These great men and women (Heb. 11:31, 35) of faith “lived in the future tense” and thus were able to overcome the temptations of the world and the flesh.

In fact, it was this same attitude of faith that carried our Lord Jesus Christ through the agony of the cross: “Jesus ... for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame” (Heb. 12:2). The emphasis in the Epistle to the Hebrews is: “Don’t live for what the world will promise you today! Live for what God has promised you in the future! Be a stranger and a pilgrim on this earth! Walk by faith, not by sight!”

This letter is not a diet for “spiritual babes” who want to be spoon-fed and coddled (Heb. 5:11–14). In this letter you will find “strong meat” that demands some “spiritual molars” for chewing and enjoying. The emphasis in Hebrews is not on what Christ did on the earth (the “milk”), but what He is now doing in heaven (the “meat” of the Word). He is the great High Priest who *enables us* by giving us grace (Heb. 4:14–16). He is also the Great Shepherd of the sheep who *equips us* to do His will (Heb. 13:20–21). He is working *in us* to accomplish His purposes. What a thrill it is for us to be a part of such a marvelous ministry!

Dr. A.W. Tozer used to remind us, “Every man must choose his world.” True believers have “tasted the good Word of God, and the powers of the world [age] to come” (Heb. 6:5); this should mean we have no interest in or appetite for the present sinful world system. Abraham chose the right world and became the father of the faithful. Lot chose the wrong world and became the father of the enemies of God’s people (Gen. 19:30–38). Abraham became the friend of God (2 Chron. 20:7), but Lot became the friend of the world—and lost everything. Lot was “saved, yet so as by fire” (1 Cor. 3:15) and lost his reward.

## It Is a Book of Exaltation

The Epistle to the Hebrews exalts the person and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. The first three verses set this high and holy theme which is maintained throughout the entire book. Their immediate purpose is to prove that Jesus Christ is superior to the prophets, men who were held in the highest esteem by the Jewish people.

*In His person*, Christ is superior to the prophets. To begin with, He is the very Son of God and not merely a man called by God. The author makes it clear that Jesus Christ is God (Heb. 1:3), for his description could never be applied to mortal man. “Brightness of His glory” refers to the shekinah glory of God that dwelt in the tabernacle and temple. (See Ex. 40:34–38 and 1 Kings 8:10. The word *SHEKINAH* is a transliteration of a Hebrew word that means “to dwell.”) Christ is to the Father what the rays of the sun are to the sun. He is the radiance of God’s glory. As it is impossible to separate the rays from the sun, it is also impossible to separate Christ’s glory from the nature of God.

“Express image” (Heb. 1:3) carries the idea of “the exact imprint.” Our English word *character* comes from the Greek word translated “image.” Literally, Jesus Christ is “the exact representation of the very substance of God” (see Col. 2:9). Only Jesus could honestly say, “He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). When you see Christ, you see the glory of God (John 1:14).

*In His work*, Christ is also superior to the prophets. To begin with, He is the Creator of the universe; for by Him, God “made the worlds” (Heb. 1:2). Not only did Christ create all things by His Word (John 1:1–5), but He also upholds all things by that same powerful Word (Heb. 1:3). “And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist [hold together]” (Col. 1:17).

The word “upholding” (Heb. 1:3) does not mean “holding up,” as though the universe is a burden on the back of Jesus. It means “holding and carrying from one place to another.” He is the God of Creation and the God of providence who guides this universe to its divinely ordained destiny.

He is also the superior Prophet who declares God’s Word. The contrast between Christ, the Prophet, and the other prophets, is easy to see:

<i>Christ</i>	<i>The Prophets</i>
God the Son	Men called by God
One Son	Many prophets
A final and complete message	A fragmentary and incomplete message

But Jesus Christ has a ministry as *Priest*, and this reveals His greatness. By Himself He “purged our sins” (Heb. 1:3). This aspect of His ministry will be explained in detail in Hebrews 7–10.

Finally, Jesus Christ reigns as *King* (Heb. 1:3). He has sat down, for His work is finished; and He has sat down “on the right hand of the Majesty on high,” the place of honor. This proves that He is equal with God the Father, for no mere created being could ever sit at God’s right hand.

Creator, Prophet, Priest, and King—Jesus Christ is superior to all of the prophets and servants of God who have ever appeared on the sacred pages of the Scriptures. It is no wonder

that the Father said, at the hour of Christ's transfiguration, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him" (Matt. 17:5). Two of the greatest prophets were there with Jesus—Moses and Elijah; but Christ is superior to them.

As we study Hebrews together, we must keep in mind that our purpose is not to get lost in curious doctrinal details. Nor is our purpose to attack or defend some pet doctrine. Our purpose is to hear God speak in Jesus Christ, and to heed that Word. We want to echo the prayer of the Greeks: "Sir, we would see Jesus" (John 12:21). If our purpose is to know Christ better and exalt Him more, then whatever differences we may have in our understanding of the book will be forgotten in our worship of Him.

## CHAPTER TWO

### GREATER THAN ANGELS

#### *Hebrews 1:4–2:18*

Angels were most important in the Jewish religion, primarily because thousands of angels assisted in the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. This fact is stated in Deuteronomy 33:2 (where "saints" in KJV means "holy ones" or "angels"); Psalm 68:17; Acts 7:53; and Galatians 3:19. Since the theme of Hebrews is the superiority of Christ and His salvation to the Law of Moses, the writer would have to deal with the important subject of angels.

This long section on angels is divided into three sections. First, there is an *affirmation* (Heb. 1:4–14) of the superiority of Christ to the angels. The proof presented consists of seven quotations from the Old Testament. Second, there is an *exhortation* (Heb. 2:1–4) that the readers (and this includes us) pay earnest heed to the Word God has given through His Son. Finally, there is an *explanation* (Heb. 2:5–18) as to how Christ, with a human body, could still be superior to angels who are spirits.

#### **Affirmation: Christ Is Superior to the Angels (Heb. 1:4–14)**

This section is comprised of seven quotations from the Old Testament, all of which prove the superiority of Christ to the angels. Scholars tell us that the writer quoted from the Greek version of the Hebrew Old Testament, known as the Septuagint. (The word *SEPTUAGINT* is a Greek word that means "seventy." Tradition claims that seventy men translated the Hebrew Old Testament into the Greek. The abbreviation for Septuagint is LXX, Roman numerals for seventy.) However, the same Holy Spirit who inspired the Scriptures has the right to quote and restate the truth as He sees fit.

Let us note the affirmations that are made about our Lord Jesus Christ, and the quotations that are cited to support them.

***He is the Son (vv. 4–5).*** The "more excellent name" that Jesus possesses is "Son." While the angels *collectively* may be termed "the sons of God" (Job 1:6), no angel would be given this title *individually*. It belongs uniquely to our Lord Jesus Christ. The first quotation is from Psalm 2:7:

“Thou art My Son, this day have I begotten Thee.” Paul pinpointed the time of this “begetting”: the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 13:33). From eternity, Jesus Christ was God the Son. He humbled Himself and became Man (see Phil. 2:5–6). In His resurrection, however, He glorified that humanity received from the Father and received back the eternal glory He had veiled (John 17:1, 5). The Resurrection declares: “Jesus is God’s Son!” (Rom. 1:4)

The second quotation is from 2 Samuel 7:14. The immediate application in David’s experience was to his son, Solomon, whom God would love and discipline as a son (see Ps. 89:27). But the ultimate application is to Jesus Christ, the “greater than Solomon” (Matt. 12:42).

***He is the Firstborn who receives worship (v. 6).*** The term “firstborn” in the Bible does not always mean “born first.” God made Solomon the firstborn (Ps. 89:27) even though Solomon is listed *tenth* in the official genealogy (1 Chron. 3:1–5). The title is one of rank and honor, for the firstborn receives the inheritance and the special blessing. Christ is the “Firstborn of all creation” (Col. 1:15, NASB) because He created all things; and He is the highest of all who came back from the dead (Col. 1:18). When He came into the world, the angels worshiped Him (quoted from Deut. 32:43 in the LXX: “Heavens, rejoice with Him, let the sons of God pay Him homage!”). God commanded them to do so, which proves that Jesus Christ is God; for none of God’s angels would worship a mere creature.

***He is served by the angels (v. 7).*** This is a quotation from Psalm 104:4. The Hebrew and Greek words for “spirit” are also translated “wind.” Angels are created spirits; they have no bodies, though they can assume human forms when ministering on earth. Angels sometimes served our Lord when He was on earth (Matt. 4:11; Luke 22:43), and they serve Him and us now.

***He is God enthroned and anointed (vv. 8–9).*** In some false cults this quotation from Psalm 45:6–7 is translated, “Thy divine throne,” because cultists dislike this strong affirmation that Jesus Christ is God. But the translation must stand: “Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever.” Angels minister *before* the throne; they do not *sit* on the throne. One of the main teachings of Psalm 110 is that Jesus Christ, God’s Anointed (Messiah, Christ), is now enthroned in glory. Jesus Himself referred to this important psalm (Mark 12:35–37; 14:62), and Peter used it on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:34–36). Our Lord has not yet entered into His earthly kingdom, but He has been enthroned in glory (Eph. 1:20).

When Christ ascended and entered the heavenly glory, He was anointed for His heavenly ministry with “the oil of gladness” (Heb. 1:9). This probably refers to Psalm 16:11, which Peter referred to at Pentecost: “Thou shalt make Me full of joy with Thy countenance” (Acts 2:28). What a joyful scene that must have been! Psalm 45 is a wedding psalm, and our Lord today is the heavenly Bridegroom who experiences “the joy that was set before Him” (Heb. 12:2). Angels praise Him, but they cannot share that position or that joy. Our Lord’s throne is forever, which means He is eternal God.

***He is the eternal Creator (vv. 10–12).*** This long quotation comes from Psalm 102:25–27. The angels did not found the earth, for they too are a part of creation. Jesus Christ is the Creator, and one day He will do away with the old creation and bring in a new creation. Everything around us changes, but He will never change. He is “the same yesterday, and today, and forever” (Heb. 13:8). Creation is like an old garment which will one day be discarded in favor of a new one.

***Christ is the Sovereign; angels are the servants (vv. 13–14).*** Again, the writer quotes Psalm 110:1. The fact that Jesus Christ is now at the Father’s right hand (the place of honor) is mentioned many times in the New Testament (see Matt. 22:43–44; 26:64; Mark 16:19; Acts

2:33–34; Rom. 8:34; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22). Angels are the ministering spirits who serve the Lord seated on the throne. But they also minister to us who are the “heirs of salvation” through faith in Christ. The angels today are serving us!

It would be impossible to do away with the evidence presented in these quotations. Jesus Christ is greater than the angels, and this means He is also greater than the Law which they helped deliver to the people of Israel.

**Pentecost, J. D. (1985). Daniel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 2, pp. 780-783). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.**

## I. Prologue (1:1–4)

In a majestically constructed opening paragraph, the writer introduced his readers at once to the surpassing greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Son, he declared, is the par excellence vehicle for divine revelation. In asserting this, he implicitly contrasted Him with the prophets of old and explicitly contrasted Him with the angels.

1:1–2a. The central assertion of the Prologue is made here. Though **God** has variously (*polymerōs kai polytropōs*, lit., “by various means and **in various ways**”) revealed Himself **in the past**, Old Testament prophetic revelation has now received its end-times climax through God’s **Son**. However highly the readership regarded that former revelation, the writer implied they must now listen most closely to the Son.

1:2b–4. In a series of subordinate constructions which are part of a single sentence in the Greek, the author set forth the Son’s greatness. The unified structure of the writer’s sentence is hidden by the NIV which breaks it down into several sentences. To begin with (v. 2b), the Son is the designated **Heir of all things**. This is obviously as it should be since He is also their Maker—the One **through whom He made the universe** (*tous aiōnas*, lit., “the ages,” also rendered “the universe” in 11:3). The reference to the Son’s heirship anticipates the thought of His future reign, of which the writer will say much.

But the One who is both Creator and Heir is also a perfect reflection of the God who has spoken in Him. Moreover **His Word** is so **powerful** that all He has made is sustained by that Word. And it is this Person who has **provided purification for sins** and taken His seat **at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven** (cf. 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). In doing so it is obvious He has attained an eminence far beyond anything **the angels** can claim.

As might easily be expected in the Prologue, the writer struck notes which will be crucial to the unfolding of his argument in the body of the epistle. He implied that God’s revelation in the Son has a definitive quality which previous revelation lacked. Moreover the sacrifice for sins which such a One makes must necessarily be greater than other kinds of sacrifices. Finally the Son’s greatness makes preoccupation with angelic dignities entirely unnecessary. Though the Prologue contains no warning—the writer reserved those for later—it carries with it an implicit admonition: This is God’s supremely great Son; hear Him! (cf. 12:25–27)

## II. Part I: God’s King-Son (1:5–4:16)

The first major unit of the body of the epistle begins at this point and extends through the dramatic appeal of 4:14–16 for the readers to avail themselves of the resources available to them

at “the throne of grace” (4:16). The emphasis of the whole unit is on the sonship of Jesus Christ which the writer viewed as a kingly sonship in accord with the Davidic Covenant.

#### A. *The King-Son exalted (1:5–14)*

Drawing heavily on the witness of Old Testament revelation, the writer demonstrated the uniqueness of the Son. The title of Son, and the prerogatives it entails, elevate Him above all comparison with the angels. Those who see in Hebrews ties with sectarian Judaism point to the highly developed angelology of the Dead Sea sect. These verses offer an effective rebuttal against any tendency to give excessive prominence to angels.

1:5. The two questions in this verse show that the name **Son** belongs to Messiah in a sense in which it never belonged to **the angels**. Obviously “Son” is the superior name which Jesus “has inherited” (v. 4). But it is clear that the special sense of this name, in its kingly ramifications, is what basically concerns the writer.

The quotation in verse 5a is drawn from Psalm 2:7, while the quotation in Hebrews 1:5b comes from either 2 Samuel 7:14 or 1 Chronicles 17:13. Psalm 2 is an enthronement psalm in which God “adopts” the Davidic King as His “Son.” That this is what the writer to the Hebrews understood is confirmed in Hebrews 1:5a by the quotation from the Davidic Covenant. No doubt the “today” in the expression **today I have become Your Father** was understood by the author of Hebrews to refer to Messiah’s sitting at the right hand of God (cf. v. 3).

Of course the Lord Jesus Christ has always been the eternal Son of God. In a collective sense, the angels are called “sons of God” in the Old Testament (Job 38:7, marg.), but the writer was thinking of the title **Son** in the sense of the Davidic Heir who is entitled to ask God for dominion over the whole earth (cf. Ps. 2:8). In this sense the title belongs uniquely to Jesus and not to the angels.

1:6. The prerogatives of the One who bears this superlative title are set forth beginning with this verse. Instead of the NIV’s **And again, when God brings His Firstborn into the world**, it would be preferable to translate, “and when He again brings the Firstborn into the world.” The reference is to the Second Advent when the kingly prerogatives of the Son will be recognized with open angelic **worship** (cf. Ps. 97:7 where the LXX rendering “**angels**” correctly renders the text).

1:7–9. In a pair of contrasting quotations, the author juxtaposed the servanthood of **the angels** (v. 7) and the eternal dominion of **the Son** (vv. 8–9). It is possible that, in line with one strand of Jewish thought about angels (cf. 2 Esdras 8:21–22), the writer understood the statement of Psalm 104:4 (quoted in Heb. 1:7) as suggesting that angels often blended their mutable natures with **winds** or **fire** as they performed the tasks God gave them. But in contrast with this mutability, the Son’s **throne** is eternal and immutable (v. 8).

The quotation found in verses 8–9 is derived from Psalm 45:6–7 which describes the final triumph of God’s messianic King. The writer extended this citation further than the previous ones, no doubt because the statements of the psalmist served well to highlight truths on which the author of Hebrews desired to elaborate. The King the psalmist described had **loved righteousness and hated wickedness**. This points to the holiness and obedience of Christ while He was on earth, to which reference will be repeatedly made later (cf. Heb. 3:1–2; 5:7–8; 7:26; 9:14). And though this King thus deservedly enjoys a superlative **joy**, still He has **companions** in that joy. The reference to “companions” is likewise a significant theme for the writer. The same word *metochoi* (“companions or sharers”) is employed in 3:1, 14 of Christians (it is also used in 12:8). Since the King has attained His joy and dominion through a life of steadfast righteousness,



it might be concluded that His companions will share His experience by that same means. This inference will later become quite clear (cf. 12:28).

1:10–12. The immutability of the King-Son is further stressed by the statements now quoted from Psalm 102:25–27. A simple “and” (*kai*, disguised a bit by NIV’s **He also says**) links the quotation in these verses with that in Hebrews 1:8–9. That the author construed the words of Psalm 102 as likewise addressed to the Son cannot be reasonably doubted. The Son, then, is **Lord** and has created both **earth** and **the heavens** (cf. Heb. 1:2). But even when the present creation wears out like an old **garment** and is exchanged for a new one, the Son will remain unchanged. The reference here of course is to the transformation of the heavens and earth which will occur after the Millennium and will introduce the eternal state (2 Peter 3:10–13). Yet even after those cataclysmic events the Son’s **years will never end**. This certainly points to His personal eternity, but it is also likely that the word “years” stands for all that they contain for the Son, including an eternal throne and scepter as well as unending joy with His companions. The writer definitely taught that Messiah’s kingdom would survive the final “shaking” of the creation (cf. Heb. 12:26–28).

1:13–14. The writer drew this section to a climax with a final Old Testament quotation, one which is crucial to the entire thought of the epistle. It is taken from Psalm 110 which the author later employed in his elaboration of the Melchizedek priesthood of the Lord Jesus. Here he cited verse 1 of the psalm to highlight the final victory of the Son over His enemies. If the Son is to have an eternal throne (Heb. 1:8), such a victory obviously awaits Him. But the victory is His and not the angels’. Their role, by contrast, is **to serve those who will inherit salvation**.

It should not be automatically assumed that “salvation” here refers to a believer’s past experience of regeneration. On the contrary it is something future as both the context and the words “will inherit” suggest. As always, the writer of Hebrews must be understood to reflect the ethos of Old Testament thought, especially so here where a chain of references to it form the core of his argument. And it is particularly in the Psalms, from which he chiefly quoted in this chapter, that the term “salvation” has a well-defined sense. In the Psalms this term occurs repeatedly to describe the deliverance of God’s people from the oppression of their **enemies** and their consequent enjoyment of God’s blessings. In the Septuagint, the Greek Bible so familiar to the writer, the word “salvation” (*sōtēria*) was used in this sense in Psalms 3:2, 8; 18:2, 35, 46, 50; 35:3; 37:39; 71:15; 118:14–15, 21; 132:16; and elsewhere. This meaning is uniquely suitable here where the Son’s own triumph over enemies has just been mentioned.

That the readers were under external pressure there is little reason to doubt. They had endured persecution in the past and were exhorted not to give up now (Heb. 10:32–36). Here the writer reminded them that the final victory over all enemies belongs to God’s King and that the angels presently serve those who are destined to share in that victory, that is, to “inherit salvation.”

**Cabal, T., Brand, C. O., Clendenen, E. R., Copan, P., Moreland, J. P., & Powell, D. (2007). The Apologetics Study Bible: Real Questions, Straight Answers, Stronger Faith (pp. 1822-1824). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.**

**1:2** The writer of Heb did not wrongly place us in the “last days.” This verse speaks of God’s revelation of Himself. In times past God spoke to the fathers by the prophets, but in these “last days” (i.e., the Messianic Age) God has revealed Himself in Christ. Jesus inaugurated the “last days,” which stretch between His first coming and His second coming. We are in the last days

and will be so until Christ returns. This period of time is also the age of the Spirit (of Jesus) in which He abundantly works and ministers.

Some object to this verse by saying that one cannot be an “heir” unless someone dies, and that therefore, if Jesus is an heir, God must be dead. But this neglects the fact that in the first century an inheritance could be passed on to an heir well before the benefactor’s death.

**1:8** Some skeptics argue that this verse, which addresses Jesus as “O God,” contradicts Jn 8:40 and Acts 17:31 which say that Jesus was a man. Such objections, however, miss the fact that Scripture teaches the concept of the “hypostatic union”—that Jesus is both fully God and fully man.

**1:10** Some have claimed that, if God “established the earth,” as this verse states, it must not move. But that is false. As the writer of Heb maintained that Christ is superior to the angels, he used Ps 102:25 and the metaphor of a foundation to describe Christ’s founding of the earth. Like other biblical writers, the author of Heb described things as they appeared to him.

**1:11** Skeptics wrongly see a contradiction between this verse, which says that the earth will perish, and Ps 78:69 and Ec 1:4, which say that it will last forever. However, in Ec 1:3 the Teacher discussed the futility and vanity of humanity’s endeavors: “What does a man gain for all his efforts he labors at under the sun?” The author continued this theme in Ec 1:4, where he viewed the earth entirely from a human perspective. In the course of life he saw the earth as abiding forever because that was how it seemed to him. Ps 78:69 was written from a similar standpoint. This verse in Heb, however, is different. Like 2 Pt 3:10, it teaches that the earth will indeed perish before the new heavens and a new earth are made (see 2 Pt 3:13).