

Lesson Three

(1:4-14; 2:5-18)

JESUS AND ANGELS

⁴having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs.

⁵For to what angel did God ever say, "Thou art my Son, today I have begotten thee"?

Or again,

"I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son"?

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

"Let all God's angels worship him."

⁷Of the angels he says,

"Who makes his angels winds, and his servants flames of fire."

⁸But of the Son he says,

"Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever,

the righteous scepter is the scepter of thy kingdom.

⁹Thou hast loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;

therefore God, thy God, has anointed thee with the oil of gladness beyond thy comrades."

¹⁰And,

"Thou, Lord, didst found the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of thy hands;

TWENTY-SIX LESSONS ON HEBREWS

¹¹they will perish, but thou remainest; they will all grow old like a garment,

¹²like a mantle thou wilt roll them up, and they will be changed. But thou art the same, and thy years will never end."

¹³But to what angel has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand, till I make thy enemies a stool for thy feet"?

¹⁴Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?

2 ⁵For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. ⁶It has been testified somewhere,

"What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou carest for him?"

⁷Thou didst make him for a little while lower than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honor,

⁸putting everything in subjection under his feet."

Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. ⁹But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one.

¹⁰For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering. ¹¹For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren, ¹²saying,

"I will proclaim thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee."

¹³And again,

"I will put my trust in him."

And again,

"Here am I, and the children God has given me."

¹⁴Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same nature, that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong bondage. ¹⁶For surely it is not with angels that he is concerned but with the descendants of Abraham. ¹⁷Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make expiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸For because he himself has suffered and been tempted, he is able to help those who are tempted.

We are now to study an extended argument designed to show that angels through whom God spoke were/are inferior to Jesus, God's "final spokesman." While the Old Covenant scriptures do not have lengthy discussions of angels, yet both Old and New Testaments contain a considerable amount of teaching about angels, their place and ministry. A short study is at the end of this lesson.

1:5 — for to what angel — Having partly described in 1:1-4 the nature of Jesus as son, concluding with the statement that Jesus is superior (= better, the first of many "betters" in this book) to the angels, a close study in contrasts is now made to enhance the previous point.

angel — a transliteration of the Greek term, ἄγγελος. A translation would be messenger.

Thou art my son — This quote from Psalms 2:7 is one proof advanced to show that Jesus is superior to any (or all) angel. They are of a created nature, Jesus is "son." God's son became flesh, but did not cease being of the nature of God. Neither is true of angels.

father . . . son — Added evidence for the character of Jesus, distinctly different than that of angels. The quote is from II Samuel 7:14, in the larger context of God's promise to David which prophetically promised a divine descendant through David's lineage, at once David's son and David's God (cf. Matthew 22:41-45).

While the scriptures use the word "son" in regard to many people in various ways, as it is applied to Jesus, there is only one son of his character.

V. 6 — firstborn — This term, found also in Colossians 1:1-5, has several ideas inherent in it. Biologically it designated the first child in a family. It came also to mean the most important, the one with dignity and honor. In reference to Jesus, while he was firstborn in relation to Joseph and Mary, it is here in reference to God and the position of honor accorded by him to Jesus.

worship — Only God is to be worshipped. Hence, this places Jesus in the category of God, and shows the distance between him and angels. Note in John 9:38 that Jesus accepted worship. The quote is somewhat like Psalms 97:7 as the Greek Old Testament (the Septuagint) has it, or Deuteronomy 32:43 in the Septuagint (= LXX). It might be pertinent to note that our author habitually quotes from the LXX, or translates the Hebrew text himself.

V. 7, 8 — Angels winds . . . flames — The heavenly messengers are servants while Jesus, as son, sits on a throne of everlasting nature, ruling in righteousness. Of course, this is but what should be, since Jesus is of the nature of God.

V. 9 — righteousness . . . lawlessness — These ideas continue the point in v. 8, that Jesus as God reflects that nature naturally, whereas angels

TWENTY-SIX LESSONS ON HEBREWS

are left out of the picture. The scripture quotes are from Psalms 104:4, and Psalms 45:6-7, which was primarily about a king of God's people, then prophetically about Jesus.

You may have noticed in comparison of translations that there are several ways to translate 8a and 9b. There is no way to decide for sure — context must play a large part in the matter. The R.S.V. rendering seems to me to represent the basic meaning of the text.

V. 10-12 — **Thou . . . didst found the earth** — A quote of Psalms 102:25-26, vv. 10-12 gives additional information about the nature of Jesus. It is significant that this quote would have been read as if God were the subject. Our author applies the text to Jesus, since he is God.

It is a moving expression for meditation on the true nature of Jesus. One can visualize the years becoming centuries, and centuries going by, but Jesus remaining ever unchanged, eternal. The same sort of idea and feeling is in many psalms, especially 91:1ff. Note that angels have receded from the picture — only the son is in view.

V. 13 — **Sit at my right hand** — Quoting Psalms 110:1, our writer pictures God bringing Jesus to the position at his right hand (notice that nowhere does the author make God and Jesus one person, rather they are always depicted as two persons), a place of dignity and honor, while never doing that for any angel.

V. 14 — **Are they not . . .** — Yes, they are but servants, receiving orders to do this or that, created to serve others, never to be served.

2:1-4 will be treated in Lesson 4.

We continue the thread of thought in ch. 1 with 2:5-18, Jesus as God's final messenger compared to angels. The section 2:5-9 highlights the point that the world, lost through man to Satan, was redeemed through Jesus, quite aside from anything angels did. 2:10-18 helps us see that Jesus became man to help man, and not to help angels.

V. 5 — **it was not to angels** — The universe about us, of which we are part, has never been placed under the authority of angels. It was placed under man. Man "lost" it in the fall, but it was regained by the man, Jesus.

V. 6 — **What is man** — Psalms 8 has humanity in view, and ultimately Jesus as man. God did care for his creation, man; so much so that Jesus was sent to taste death for every man (but not even one angel).

V. 7 — In the matter of time and position, mankind has a relative place in respect to angels. They are heavenly beings while man is earthly; yet man has had the world placed under his authority (Genesis 1, 2, 3) while angels have not.

V. 8 — **We do not yet see** — Because of man's sin, some control was forfeited. Man, as man, failed to be what was possible.

V. 9 — **But we see Jesus** — Viewing man apart from Jesus, things look hopeless. If nothing else be true, sin can't be conquered. Man is doomed

to defeat. When Jesus comes into the picture, defeat is turned into victory, sin is overcome, righteousness prevails. Angels, however, did not bring said results about — Jesus did. It was specifically his death, a death for every man, that resulted in a restored state for man, and the coronation of Jesus because of his part in the matter. This was the idea in 1:3, here enlarged.

taste — The idea is that of entering into, participation in, experiencing. Note Matthew 16:28; Luke 14:24; John 8:52; Acts 10:10; Colossians 2:9, 21; I Peter 2:3 for uses of the word "taste." It will appear again in 6:4.

V. 10 — **it was fitting** — Enlarging upon the point in v. 9, the author brings out clearly that Jesus, not angels, came to take upon himself the form of man, so that he might help man in ways that man could not help himself. This text gives one view of the "word becoming flesh" and "dwelling among men."

of whom and by whom — Refers to God the father, but is true of his son, though here the emphasis is upon the humanity of Jesus.

pioneer — The one who takes the lead for others, the "trail-blazer." See 12:2.

perfect — complete, full, needing nothing. Jesus became everything necessary to provide a complete redemption for man. No angel could do this, nor was it done for angels.

V. 11 — Jesus spoke about "oneness" in John 17, a oneness with God, with the twelve, and with those who would believe on him through the message proclaimed. The gospel is intended to unify, to make one out of many. "Brethren" is an expression of that unity. Notice that Jesus uses the term for all those who are being sanctified. A good parallel text is II Corinthians 6:14 — 7:1 in this regard. The same Greek term is translated "holy" and "sanctify." Note 12:10.

V. 12 — Quoting Psalms 22:22, the verse follows the terrible picture of agony which the person had endured. The person, of course, is Jesus. Following his suffering, however, comes the time of praise and the salvation made available through the suffering, a picture which dovetails with our text in 2:9ff.

V. 13 — **I will put my trust** — A scripture from Isaiah 12:2, which conveys a trusting life, one devoted to God despite life's problems and in view of God's blessings, which is appropriate in our discussion about Jesus.

Here am I — From Isaiah 8:18, this text is primarily concerned with the prophet's choice to commit himself to God's keeping, relying upon God for all his life. It is a great thought that Jesus leads the way for all by his trust in God, and allows all who will to share in that life.

V. 14 — **the children share** — continuing the discussion of Jesus' relationship to man (and not to angels), a "sharing" idea is presented. If

TWENTY-SIX LESSONS ON HEBREWS

through man sin came, then by man righteousness came. If by man sin brought death, by man righteousness brings life (note Romans 5:12-21). Jesus became like his creation, man, and the main thrust of this was to bring to naught the result of sin. In doing so, the devil's power was destroyed, and every person who so desires can enjoy emancipation from sin, enjoying freedom as sons of God.

V. 15 — **fear of death** — Because of Jesus' sacrificial death, the fear that death holds for us as humans can be removed. While physical (the context is presumably about physical death) death as a fact yet remains, Christians can treat it as a door to God's presence where no death ever happens, Revelation 21:4.

As noted, it seems that physical death is in view here. However, we have mentioned sin, and a result of sin, physical death. The reader will know, however, that sin affects every person in a "spiritual" way as well as a "physical way." In fact, the "spiritual death" (as we call it) is by far the most vital "death" with which to be concerned. Jesus not only removed the fear associated with physical death, his sacrifice, if accepted, makes it possible for every Christian to have the fear of (and fact of) spiritual death removed. This may also be the thrust of the text. In fact, the devil would like for Christians to be more concerned with the physical than the spiritual, a tendency we must guard against at all times. Hence, it is important to think about sin, and spiritual relationships when we study this text. Jesus didn't remove the fact of our physical death. He did provide the escape from dying "spiritually" if we accept it. (Note: one of the reasons we have used quotation marks around "physical" and "spiritual" is that those adjectives are human additions — the Bible text doesn't use the expressions "physical death" and "spiritual death." The context must determine which is in mind. In fact, sin brings death, James 1:12-15, whether physical, spiritual or both.)

V. 16 — **it is not with angels** — The contrast is yet present: not only are angels not superior to Jesus, all that Jesus did was not for them. They may desire to participate (I Peter 1:10-12) but no provision was made for them in what Jesus did.

descendants of Abraham — Here the idea is those of faith who become sons of Abraham. See Romans 4:1ff.; Galatians 3:28-29; etc.

V. 17 — **Therefore** — As God so willed it, Jesus as savior had to become like those whom he was saving, at least in some respects. He must experience humanity in such a way that he could adequately provide for every need thereof, and not excluding the main need, that of forgiveness of sins. The service of God insofar as Jesus went involved both dying for sin and living to make intercession for those being sanctified.

V. 18 — Explanatory of Jesus' work as high priest, this completes the discussion of the difference between Jesus and angels. Not only are angels merely servants, they are not able to share in the redemption made possible through Jesus.

It will be good to sum up the points made in 2:5—18; Jesus is pioneer, sanctifier and high priest—angels are none of these. Add these ideas to those in ch. 1 and the immense difference between God's messengers for the Old Covenant and God's messenger for the New Covenant becomes evident. Hence, there is likewise a vast gulf between the two covenants as well. Indeed, Christians have the "better" of the two.

SPECIAL STUDY ON ANGELS

The word "angel" is a transliteration of the Greek term *ἄγγελος*, which basically meant a messenger, or representative. The root appears in the Greek term *εὐαγγέλιον*, which is normally translated "gospel." The messengers were normally non-human, and in some ways superior to man, as our text indicates. We might call them "spiritual beings" to differentiate them from human/non-spiritual (i.e., having no physical body). That they are actual beings, and not figments of the imagination is true (we ought, as Christians, not to be like the Sadducees, Acts 23:6-8. Note Jesus' teaching about them in Luke 20:27-40).

In the lesson, Jesus was depicted as greater than angels, some through whom God had spoken to Israel and others. Stephen made mention in Acts 7:53 to the part these heavenly messengers had in God's revelation to Israel. Paul does likewise in Galatians 3:19. There is much activity in the Revelation letter, where these non-human personalities serve God in a great variety of ways. Some angelic activity recorded in the Bible would include the following:

Appearances to Abraham, Genesis 18:1ff.; 22:11-18; Hagar, Genesis 16:7-13; 21:17-20; Jacob, Genesis 28:10-22; Moses, Exodus 3:2ff. (see Ex. 14:19); Joshua, Joshua 5:13-15; Gideon, Judges 6:11ff.; Manoah, Judges 13:1ff.; Ezekiel, Ch. 40 for example; Balaam, Numbers 22:21-35; Elijah, I Kings 19:5; Daniel 8:16ff.; Elisha, II Kings 6:11ff.; 19:35; Zechariah, Luke 1:11-20; Joseph, Matthew 2:13; Mary, Luke 1:26-38; to the shepherds, Luke 2:8-14; the apostles, Acts 5:17ff.; Cornelius, Acts 10:1ff.; Peter, Acts 12:6ff.; Paul, Acts 27:21ff.; John, Revelation 1:1; etc.

Other scriptures show that God has heavenly messengers for heirs of salvation, Psalms 91:11; Hebrews 1:14 (although we are not sure what particular function they have) and Matthew 18:10 (where the reference may be to little children, although the discussion shades into believers in Jesus). The text of Luke 16:19ff. has Lazarus being transported to Abraham's bosom by angels. The resurrection accounts in all four of the gospels have angels appearing to people and speaking various messages.

Earlier in Luke 23, angels had appeared to Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane, and he mentions that he had at his command twelve legions

TWENTY-SIX LESSONS ON HEBREWS

of angels, Matthew 26:53. The text in Luke 15:10 brings to our attention that these heavenly beings know when even one person is redeemed, and rejoice because of it. Jesus tells two parables of judgment in Matthew 13 and angels are involved in both (note here Mark 8:38; 13:27; Luke 12:8ff.; II Thessalonians 1:7ff.).

Bible readers will know that other heavenly beings called angels exist, but who serve Satan (who evidently is also of the same nature) rather than God. Matthew 25:41 speaks about Satan and his messengers for whom the hell of fire was originally created. Whether these messengers are to be equated with demons (King James 'devils') is questioned, but it seems likely. These beings were evidently created sinless, but with ability to choose and to will, and chose to serve Satan rather than God. Jude v. 6 and II Peter 2:4 show that some of them sinned and are awaiting punishment. Revelation brings to our attention many thousands of angels, both good and bad.

From these references, we can draw some ideas about these heavenly beings we call angels (remembering that the Scripture applies the term "angel" to other beings than heavenly beings, such as in Revelation 2:1, etc.): God has created other beings than us humans, who have functions in his universe, they who are of God serve humanity in a variety of ways, they are in some ways "higher" than humans yet are not as privileged as humans, and the "good" angels manifest a personal interest in the salvation process. They are indeed a most notable part of God's creation, yet Jesus is superior to them, and thus the message through Jesus is superior to any message from them. Carefully consider Galatians 1:8-9 in this regard. Note also the tendency of some to place angels in a position that is unscriptural, Colossians 2:17.

QUESTIONS FROM LESSON 3:

16. From the whole discussion of the text, why was it necessary for Jesus to be contrasted to angels?
17. Point out as many contrasts as you can between Jesus and angels.
18. Did Jesus die for angels?
19. Though angels are "higher" than humans, can they also sin?
20. List some of the ways that a knowledge of angels helps us.
21. What would you say is the basic position that God's messengers fill?
22. Are there evil heavenly beings as well as good ones?