

Jesus: Superior to the Angels Part 2

Text: Hebrews 1:4–14

Angels are in. At least, that is the word from the marketplace. Entire stores specialize in angels — every shape, size, and style. And curiosity-driven buyers are keeping the shelves bare.

If you are like me, you cannot help wondering what all this means. Is it a curiosity rooted in aesthetics or religion? Are these synthetic images ornamental or sacramental? Are we dealing with artistic innocence or spiritual deception?

Why not use this as an opportunity to lead your people into a biblical understanding of angels? Some points you may wish to develop include the following: (1) Any relationship between an artist’s rendering of angels and the biblical teaching on angels is only coincidental. Such depictions are hardly synonymous with God’s emissaries who conversed with Abraham over the destiny of Sodom and Gomorrah. (2) The spurious notion that every person has an assigned angel charged with oversight, inspiration, and protection is hardly consistent with the biblical presentation of angels. Scripture presents angels as unique agents of God, dispatched at His will to minister both to himself and His people. There is no room here for sentimentality. (3) Inanimate objects possess no power whatsoever.

Jesus: Superior to the Angels

THE THESIS

“So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs” (verse 4).

THE ARGUMENT

<i>A Dialogue with the Son</i>	<i>A Directive to the Angels</i>	<i>A Description of the Son</i>
To which of the angels Did God ever say, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father”? (see Psalm 2:7). “I will be his Father, and he will be my Son”? (see 2 Samuel 7:14). “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a Footstool for your feet”? (see Psalm 110:1).	He says, “Let all God’s angels worship Him” (see Deuteronomy 32:43*). “He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire” (see Psalm 104:4). “See Septuagint (kai proskunsatosan) thought by Delitzsch to be a liturgical use. Not found in the Hebrew.	About the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. 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” (see Psalm 45:6,7). “In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. 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” (see Psalm 102:25–27).

SERMON OUTLINE

1. (Illustrated in) the Father’s dialogue with the Son.
2. (Illustrated in) the Father’s directive to the angels.
3. (Illustrated in) the Father’s description of the Son.

Everywhere the Scriptures decry any attempt to attach spiritual powers to objects made by men’s hands.

Having touched briefly on the general subject of angels, you will want to move next to a consideration of the text with its most fascinating presentation of the angelic world. Be reminded that the first-century readers would have been more familiar with this celestial world than we. Theirs was a society steeped in all types of superstition — including sometimes the indiscriminate ascription of human experiences to the work of angels.

Against this background of familiarity the writer to the Hebrews draws a comparison between authentic angels and Jesus Christ — showing Jesus to be better in every way. It is a striking and convincing comparison and would have resonated with striking force in the hearts and minds of these early Hebrew readers. They would have found in the comparison a strong reason to accept their new Christian faith. It is a powerful and convincing literary argument.

You are ready now to consider the thought flow of the entire passage. Look carefully at the analytical outline and observe that I have taken the liberty to rearrange both the introductory statements and the Old Testament quotations themselves to clarify the inner relationships in the passage. My goal has been to treat the text with integrity and yet allow its thought flow to dictate both the arrangement of the materials as well as determine the assigned description for each section.

Generally, the quotations from the Old Testament are exact. Any variations can be explained by the

apparent use of the Greek Septuagint rather than the Hebrew text. In one instance, as is noted in the outline, the words that appear are not found at all in the Hebrew text and are thought by some (Delitzsch) to be the result of a liturgical use of the Song of Moses. It is worth noting, however, that the majority of the Old Testament quotations found in this text are quoted with great accuracy. This is in testimony to the careful use of Old Testament Scripture by the New Testament.

The Thesis

We begin with a consideration of the thesis or central theme of the text: “So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs” (verse 4). All that follows is illustrative and explanatory of this central theme. The subsequent quotations provide the evidentiary material to support the writer’s claim that Jesus is superior by far to the angels. This is true as to His person and to His name.

It is fascinating that superiority is linked here to name — “The name he has inherited is superior to theirs.” Since angels are typically nameless, one wonders why the comparison moves in this direction. Perhaps it is suggestive of a large hierarchy of angels with only several at the top bearing names (Gabriel and Michael). In comparison to the highest of positioned angels, Jesus is seen to be superior. The rhetorical language of the text only helps to dramatize the comparison — a clever and wonderful literary device.

The Argument

Now we come to the supportive and illustrative materials themselves. I have divided the quotations into three sections: (1) a dialogue with the Son, (2) a directive to the angels, and (3) a description of the Son. It appears that the writer is “stacking up evidence” with a broad sweep of Old Testament quotations, leaving no doubt in the reader’s mind that Jesus is indeed superior to the angels. It is as if the writer is saying: “Listen to God when He talks with His Son, when He addresses the angels, and in His personal description of His Son — in all these encounters Jesus’ superiority is dramatically established.”

A dialogue with the Son. The dialogue here secures the essential link between the Father and the Son as to relationship. You will find strong hints of the incarnation (“I have become your Father”), as well as a defining statement on eternal presence (“Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”). The point is: To which of the angels has the Father entertained such conversation? It is a rhetorical question with an assumed reply: None.

In addition to the theme significance of the dialogue, there is also a strong statement on the interrelationships within the Trinity. Granted, there is no reference here to the Holy Spirit, but there is a strong statement as to the highly personal and interlinking relationship between the Father and the Son. It exudes warmth, affection, and essential oneness. The angels are strangers to this.

A directive to the angels. Here the contrast is most striking. The angels are called upon and charged to give worship to the Son. God has made “his angels winds” and “his servants flames of fire.” Superiority is obvious. The angels bow to the Son. Worship flows from them to Him. And all of this at the special direction of the Father.

In a sense, the theme of the entire Book of Hebrews rises to its highest level in these introductory verses. Later Jesus is compared to mortals, tabernacles, laws, religious systems, and other more earthly entities. But here the comparative elements move to the heavens. The point is clear: Not only is Jesus superior to all that is earthly, but He is also equally superior even to the created beings in heaven. Wisely and divinely has the writer chosen these comparisons. Jesus is better — even when compared with all the created hosts of heaven.

A description of the Son. The writer turns now to Old Testament quotations. Each provided significant detail — as if the writer is ready to “clinch the argument.” The Father’s description of the Son might be summarized this way: (1) His throne is eternal. (2) His righteousness is the symbol of His power. (3) His love of righteousness and hatred of evil secures His unique influence. (4) He has been set above all His companions. (5) He has been anointed with the oil of gladness (Hebrews 1:8,9).

The writer continues in verses 10–12. (6) He has laid the foundation of the earth and established the heavens. (7) His eternity is assured. (8) He will outlast all that is perishable. (9) His nature is immutable.

What more can possibly be said? It is as if the writer has stated his proposition, presented his evidence, and drawn his conclusion. Jesus is superior. It is incredibly convincing. The last word has been spoken.

Sermon Outline

Having traced the thought flow of the passage, consider how the sermon might be developed. Obviously, a text like this — as glorious as it is — is not easily preached. You will need to add your own creative touch and illustrative materials to help the message breathe with interest and challenge.

Pick up on the inherent drama in the text. Let your mind absorb the impact of the Father’s dialogue with the Son and spend time meditating on that most fascinating conversation. This will prepare you well for the

preaching event. Then explore the movement and activities of the angels as they, like wind and flames of fire, come before Christ in humble worship and adoration. Here again your ponderings will open to you a great source of preaching material. In the description section, you will find a rich assortment of defining and descriptive statements that will preach well.

As you consider the call to the altar, why not focus on the superiority of Jesus. If the Father has so carefully established His absolute lordship, why not follow His example and make Jesus sovereign Lord and Master of your lives? This will fulfill the final purposes of this incredibly glorious text.

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