

○ WHAT A SAVIOR!

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By the Book™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study
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Let's Begin

Hebrews may be the most neglected book in the New Testament. Its language is lofty and sometimes highly technical. It repeatedly speaks of Old Testament sacrifices, Levitical priests, and has an entire chapter on a strange, mysterious person named Melchizedek, king of Salem (chapter 7). Also, it contains some passages extremely difficult to understand (e.g. 6:1-6). Plus it does not even state explicitly the author's name! (refer to the Introduction to Hebrews for help with this question). Because of these reasons and more, Christians tend to move on to easier, more familiar passages of the Bible.

We believe overlooking Hebrews is a tragic mistake, however. Since all of the Bible is God's Word, we are convinced that all of the Bible is relevant to us. Consequently, we suffer the loss of spiritual blessings if we avoid studying a portion of the Bible we may have difficulty understanding.

Hence, before we get started, we note a few reasons why studying Hebrews is helpful to Christians. Studying Hebrews:

Encourages believers: *Too many Christians are still in spiritual kindergarten. They seem content "just" to be saved. But being a Christian is not a stagnant position. We must grow. Hence, we do not go back; we go on!*

Examines faith: *No other book in the New Testament tests the genuineness of our faith more than Hebrews.*

Exalts Jesus Christ: *In Jesus we have God's final word! We have a better Savior, a better sacrifice, a better priest, better promises, a better resurrection, a better destiny. In fact, we have a better everything in Christ!*

As we begin our study of Hebrews, let's follow the outline for chapter one below:

- I. Jesus Christ Out-speaks the Prophets (vv. 1-3)**
- II. Jesus Christ Out-ranks the Angels (vv. 4-9; cp. 13-14)**
- III. Jesus Christ Out-lasts the Universe (vv. 10-12)**

I. Jesus Christ Out-speaks the Prophets (vv. 1-3)

During the 18th Century, there existed an influential group of theologians who were known as Deists. While Deists believed as do Christians that God *created* the universe, they did not believe as Christians do that God *sustains* the universe. In other words, Deists believed that after God created the world, He simply walked away and left it to run on its own. For example, think of a clock which one would wind. Once wound, the clock keeps time all by itself (until it runs down, of course). That is how Deists viewed the universe—God's gigantic time-clock. He did not need to involve Himself in the affairs of men any longer. Once created, men could live and let live without His interference or assistance.

Unlike this rationalistic view of God, the author believed God not only created the universe, but also made Himself known to His creation! He begins, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, Hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds" (vv. 1-2). Two basic truths are assumed by the author. First, God is *real*. No attempt to prove God exists will be found here. Second, God *reveals*. The God of the universe speaks! The author assures us He has "spoke unto us."

First, God has spoken to us in His partial word. Note the author's focus on "in



Reflection Connection

If God's Word in the Old Testament Scriptures is partial, does that mean it is also fallible? Explain. Perhaps this would be a great time to invite your pastor into the study group to offer a summary on the doctrine of Biblical inspiration.

times past" (v. 1). To what does the author of Hebrews refer? He spoke "by the prophets." Clearly, the author is alluding to the Old Testament Scriptures. Over a span of some 1500 years, with at least 40 authors, God progressively revealed Himself with more and more light. Because the revelation was progressive in nature, it stands to reason at no time could the prophecies be considered full and complete (cp. Acts 10:43). Hence, it was a partial, fragmentary unveiling of God (cp. 1 Peter 1:10-12).

In addition, the partial revelation was also a varied revelation, or, in the author's words, "many ways." He spoke to Abraham in visions, Moses and Elijah in voices, and Joseph in dreams. Partial revelation and varied revelation came via the prophets of the Old Testament.

Second, *God has spoken to us in His final word.* Observe the author's phrase, "in these last days" (v. 2). God's full, complete, final word was in His Son, Jesus Christ! God's supreme self-revelation was not in a book; instead His supreme self-revelation was in a Body! Pen and ink could not express Him fully. Only a Person could reveal the Father in all His glory!

Furthermore, in the *final word*, the author piles one magnificent statement upon another concerning Who Jesus is as God's *final word* (vv. 2-3):

- ♦ "*heir of all things*"—Jesus is the consummation of all creation, inheriting claim to all things. Indeed God restored to Him all Adam lost by sin (cp. Rev. 5). And, while earthly heirs tend to be selfish, Jesus is not! Rather He shares all with us, making us "joint-heirs" (Rom. 8:16-17).
- ♦ "*made ages*"—He created the universe and all it takes to make it function (cp. Col. 1:16). We are no grand, colossal "accident" as so-called "modern" science dictates. Rather our Maker was Jesus (John 1:3).
- ♦ "*radiance of His Glory*"—Jesus' glow cannot be quenched. He "shines forth." Jesus Christ expresses God (cp. 2 Cor. 4:6; Acts 26:13).
- ♦ "*express image*"—He is the exact reproduction of God's nature. The stamp of deity is on Jesus (cp. Col. 1:15). In fact, Jesus perfectly displays the character of the God of the universe (John 14:9). If anyone wants to know what God is like, one only needs to look at Jesus. In Him, God opened His heart and showed us what He is like.
- ♦ "*upholds...power*"—Jesus holds the entire destiny of the universe in His hands (Col. 1:17). And, if God can sustain the universe, can He not carry our burdens?
- ♦ "*made purification.. our sins*"—the author gives us the first glimpse of Calvary, moving directly from creation to the cross. We have a choice: we may pay the penalty for our sins—the penalty of which is eternal death—or accept His payment at the cross (cp. 1 John 1:7; Rev. 1:25). He took the penalty for our sins on Himself.
- ♦ "*sat down at right hand*"—the Old Testament High Priest never sat down. But Jesus did. Nor was He left on the cross. From the cross, He cried, "it is finished" (John 19:30). Now, Christ sits on His heavenly throne in all the glory of heaven.



God's *final word* is magnificent indeed! He out-speaks the prophets. He is God's final, total, eternal Word. To hear God, one must hear Jesus.

II. Jesus Christ Out-ranks the Angels (vv. 4-9; cp. 13-14)

Not only does Jesus Christ *out-speak* the prophets, He also *out-ranks* the angels. Note the clear words of the author, "Being made so much better than the angels...obtained a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son?...And let all the angels of God worship him...But unto the Son *he saith*, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever..." (vv. 4-9). The author moves into an entirely different world than the one with which he previously dealt concerning the prophets—the world of angels.

The ancient world focused much on angelic beings. In fact, it could be said that while they made too much of them, we actually make too little. Yet angels are real; angels exist today. In the Old Testament, there are 108 references to angels compared to 165 in the New Testament. Angels work for the Lord. They attended to Jesus, and they serve the redeemed.

The author employs at least seven Old Testament passages to demonstrate how Jesus out-ranks God's angels. In fact, according to the author, Christ out-ranks angels in two important ways.

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Reflection Connection

Do you ever reflect on angelic beings? Why or why not? Do you think there is healthy teaching in the church pertaining to angels? Explain.

First, Jesus Christ out-ranks angels with His *excellent name*—His "more excellent name" (vv. 4-8). As we already mentioned, angels are servants of God. However, while Jesus came to serve and give His life a ransom for many (Mark 10:45), Jesus is much more than a servant. Jesus is the Son of God (cp. v. 5; Ps. 2:7; 2 Sam. 7:14). Angels attended both His birth and resurrection. And, they will also accompany Him at His second coming. They even will worship Him when He returns again (cp. v. 6. Ps. 97:7). The author's point is clear: angels are before the throne; Jesus is on the throne! (cp. v. 7 with Ps. 104:4; v. 5, 8-9 with Ps. 45:6-7).

Second, Jesus Christ out-ranks angels with His *exalted nature* (vv. 9, 13-14). Jesus is the "anointed one." He was anointed on earth by the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, everything in the universe will be subjected to Him (cp. Ps. 110:1). All enemies will be crushed under His feet, a promise no angel received. Angels are exclusively servants, servants who will wait on us throughout eternity!



III. Jesus Christ Out-lasts the Universe (vv. 10-12)

Finally, not only did Jesus *out-speak* the prophets and *out-rank* the angels, He also *out-lasts* the universe (vv. 10-12). The author says it like this, “And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail” (vv. 10-12).

Presently, the universe is upheld by the very Word of Jesus Christ. There is coming a day, however, when the *creation will collapse*. All the work of His hands “shall perish”(v. 10; cp. Ps. 102:25-27). Jesus created the earth and the heavens, and created both out of nothing. He merely spoke and it came into being. Furthermore, He continues creating today. However, His creative powers are at work making new people in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 5:17). Those who place their faith in Jesus become “new creatures.”

In addition, one future day, the creation will wear out. And, like a worn out old sweater, it will be tossed outside. In fact, according to the apostolic word, nothing in this world lasts. A new dress gets a hole, and a new car will rust. Science books become quickly outdated. In short, the creation is winding down (cp. 2 Peter 3:10; Rev. 21:1). And, if the Lord removed His sustaining hand, the universe would instantaneously disintegrate.

Yet, while creation is set to collapse, Christ promises to continue! Stars may come and go but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever! (cp. 13:8) “Thou remainest” the author assures us (v. 11). Jesus is never subject to change. Billions of years from now, the Lord will remain the same for the Lord is holy, perfect, and complete.

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Reflection Connection

When you lay down to sleep at night, do you think about whether the sun will rise or not the next day? Are we reluctant to thank our Lord for His sustaining hand, preserving our universe for us?

Stars may come and go but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever!



Golden Greek Nugget

The author of Hebrews begins his extended treatment of angels early on in chapter one (v. 4). The Greek term translated “angels” is *angelos*, which means “messenger”; that is, one who is sent to announce or proclaim a message. Throughout the Old Testament we have consistent witness to the heavenly “messengers” sent to communicate God’s word and will. Hebrews makes it clear that angels have a new purpose in ministering to the redeemed in Jesus Christ (cp. v. 14).

Wrap Up

In this study, we have discovered how Jesus Christ is superior to every means God has ever attempted to communicate with us. The heavens declare the glory of God; prophets of old spoke the inspired syllables of the Almighty; but nothing or no one compared to God’s words when He spoke in the Person of Jesus Christ. Consequently, He upholds the universe, for He is God in human flesh. No angel can compare with Him. He is the everlasting Father, the Prince of peace (cp. Isaiah 9:1-6).

