

Greater than Angels

“Being made so much better than the angels, as he [Christ Jesus] hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.”
—*Hebrews 1:4*

THE BOOK OF HEBREWS

is the epistle of “better things.” In addition to this phrase, Paul writes of “better promises;” a “better hope;” a “better testament” or covenant; a “better mediator;” and a “better priesthood.”

Upon the spiritual altar and in the tabernacle which God has constructed, rather than man, are offered “better sacrifices.” It is a “more excellent ministry,” leading to a “better country,” even as the fulfillment, the complete work, is better than the blueprints found in the Old Testament.

For our present discussion, we will examine Paul’s words concerning a special being “better than the angels,” Christ Jesus. This important truth is the first of the “better things” named in the Book of Hebrews and is found in the opening chapter of the epistle. In the ensuing pages, we will present a verse by verse consideration of this chapter, under the title—“Greater than Angels.”

VERSE 1—“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets.” More literally, the thought is that the divine revelations of the past were given in many ways, and by fragments, or morsels—“here a little, and there a little.” (Isa. 28:10) These were scattered bits or pieces given in visions, shadows, and prophecies to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the progenitors of the Jewish people; as well as to Moses, Samuel, David, and all the prophets.

In Hosea 12:10 we read, “I have also spoken by the prophets, and I have multiplied visions, and used similitudes [likenesses], by the ministry of the prophets.” Again, in Amos 3:7 we read, “Surely the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets.”

VERSE 2—“[God] 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.” Here “these last days” are the closing days of the Old Testament period, and the opening days of the Christian era. The old methods which God had employed in dealing with his people in the past were no longer to be used. His people were now to be “Israelites indeed,” a “New Creation.” (John 1:47; II Cor. 5:17, *The Emphatic Diaglott*) All the messages and partial statements of the past were now gathered into a complete whole and revealed through Christ, God’s only begotten Son.

Paul says that through Christ God has “spoken unto us.” Here the emphasis is that God was speaking to the same Hebrew people as in the past. If an angel had come to them with a message, they would have listened. One greater than angels came with

the Gospel message, and the vast majority of Israel rejected him. God then turned to the Gentiles, giving them the opportunity to become a part of the “us” class. Now the oracles of God belong to all believers, Jew and Gentile alike.—Rom. 2:6-11; 3:1,2; 9:4,5

God now speaks through his Son! What loving condescension is here shown. All God’s works speak volumes about him, but in his Son we have the most complete revelation. In him is revealed the brightness of God’s glory. Every glorious beauty of the Creator’s character—his wisdom, justice, love and power—shines forth through his Son’s humility, meekness, loving-kindness, patience, endurance, and self-denial. As John recorded, the glory of Christ Jesus is “as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”—John 1:14

God’s wonderful Son was trained in the ways of his Father throughout all the eons since the time of his creation. He was brought up under the Father’s care and instruction. (Prov. 8:30) He was there when all the angels were created, for he did the work of creation. (John 1:3; I Cor. 8:6; Eph. 3:9; Col. 1:16) By his Son, God “made the worlds,” Paul says. This can have the meaning “on account of whom the Father created the worlds,” or arranged the various ages in his great divine plan, those ages in and through which he will accomplish all his good purposes.

VERSE 3—“Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Here the Greek word translated “express image” is *charakter*,

meaning “the impression as of a stamp or die, an exact copy.” This refers to Jesus’ condition since his resurrection, when he was exalted to the divine nature. He is, therefore, “the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.” He is “before all things,” being the “firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell.” (Col. 1:15-19) What strong expressions are these, and how complete! By these we know that the Father has placed all things in the hands of his Son, and that all the Son’s acts, words, and thoughts are just like those of the Father.

How could two such beings exist separately and yet be one in thought, plan and will? We remember that all through the ages of the past our Lord Jesus, as the agent of the Father, had watched him, studied him, and found supreme delight in the Father’s ways of wisdom and beauty. He was as one brought up by Jehovah, trained and educated in his presence. When Lucifer endeavored to carry out his selfish ambition, Jesus was there and saw the rebellion. He also witnessed the disobedience and fall of man. When some of the angels fell and sinned, Jesus observed, and noted that abiding close to the Father, obeying him and practicing his ways, brought happiness and security and favor.

“Upholding all things by the word of his power.” The “word of his power” is a reference to the authority of Jesus’ utterance, given to him by his Father. The expression also includes Jesus’ actual power or energy by which he is now able to accomplish the work of Jehovah. “All power is given unto

me in heaven and in earth,” Jesus said, subsequent to his resurrection.—Matt. 28:18

“When he had by himself purged our sins,” or as the *Diaglott* translates it, “made a purification for sins.” How clearly this shows that it was Jesus who was offered to effect purification, beginning the great work of eradicating sin from the earth. The word “purification” is translated from a Greek word meaning “a washing off, or cleansing, as of filth or dirt,” and such is the character of sin as viewed by God. The use of the adverb “when” shows that the purification must first be accomplished before the blessing could come.

“Sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Jesus, having placed the value of his ransom sacrifice in the hands of God’s justice, was exalted to the right hand of the Father, enabling him to bring about the salvation and deliverance of mankind. This was the exalted position promised to him as ruler with his Father, “Even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.” (Rev. 3:21) Through the psalmist, God prophesied of Jesus, “Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.” (Ps. 110:1) Being at the “right hand of the Majesty on high,” denotes the height of greatness, and such is the throne of God—the highest position of honor and trust in the universe.

VERSE 4—“Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.” The word “better” might be more properly rendered “stronger, more powerful, greater.” Lucifer had sought this high position, endeavoring to exalt himself “above the

stars of God.” (Isa. 14:13) Jesus gained the position by obedience and self-denial. Through this training, he realized how great the responsibilities were, and how much care, patience, and love must be exercised in carrying out the Heavenly Father’s plans. The Son of God, before he came to earth, occupied a very high position in the divine arrangement, but after his work of redemption he was still more highly exalted, obtaining “a more excellent name” than all angels.

VERSE 5—“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?” This is a sweeping statement, showing that while all the angels are considered sons of God, none had the honor of being directly created by him, as had the “only begotten” of the Father. Paul here quoted scriptures to prove that such statements in Psalm 2:7 and II Samuel 7:14—familiar to the Jews—could have reference to only one being, and that was the anointed Son of God.—Ps. 89:20-27

In the phrase, “This day have I begotten thee,” the word “begotten” is taken from the Hebrew word *yalad*, meaning to “bear or bring forth, as in childbirth.” Apparently it does not refer to Jesus’ original creation, but to his deliverance from death to the divine nature at his resurrection.

VERSE 6—“And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.” The first part of this verse from the Diaglott reads: “And when again he shall introduce the first born into the habitable.”

This was Paul's crowning proof of Jesus' superiority, that when the proclamation is made of Jesus' resurrection and exaltation as the worthy Lamb of God, all the angels shall worship him. John the Revelator witnessed this scene in vision, and said, "I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." —Rev. 5:11,12

VERSE 7—"And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire." Here Paul quotes Psalm 104:4, showing that angels occupy a very high position in the divine arrangement. To them has been given the great honor and privilege of being God's special messengers, or agents. Thus did they serve Daniel, Moses, Abraham, and the prophets; and they are commissioned to serve us, who are heirs of "salvation." (Heb. 1:14) The fact that Jesus was exalted above the angels speaks eloquently to the height of his glory.

VERSE 8—"But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom." This is a quotation from Psalm 45:6 concerning Jesus. How great was the reward of being the trusted and chosen agent to dispense the favors and blessings of God to his creatures! Ultimately this will earn their undying love, loyalty, and gratitude. None is as fit and suitable and able as Jesus for this exalted position. He earned it rightfully by self-abnegation,

and by perfect trust in and love for his Heavenly Father.

Christ Jesus' rule from his heavenly throne will begin with the Messianic Age, and the work of bringing mankind back into harmony with the Creator. It will be the best of all ages up to that time, but it will lead to still greater ages to come. In one sense, when all things are subdued under the Son, and he hands the kingdom over to the Father, Christ's kingdom will have accomplished its work of restoration and deliverance. (I Cor. 15:28) In a larger sense, however, the kingdom of Christ will never end, because that which he establishes will continue throughout eternity. (Dan. 2:44; 7:18; Isa. 9:6,7) When the Messianic kingdom work is complete, there will be other works and other ages in which Jesus will share the throne of his Father.

The "sceptre" is Jesus' authority or right to rule. It is a "sceptre of righteousness"—that is, a sceptre granted to Jesus because of his righteousness and because the Heavenly Father knew he would exercise his position of rulership in harmony with righteousness.

VERSE 9—"Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows." This verse is a quotation from Psalm 45:7. Jesus did not merely practice righteousness; he loved the righteous way. He also hated iniquity, or lawlessness.

"Therefore." It was because Jesus loved the law of God and found delight in its every demand upon his being, that he could be trusted with all power

and be given full authority over both men and angels. Thus, he was anointed by God with the “oil of gladness” above all other beings—set apart and prepared in every particular to do a great work, one that carries much responsibility.

The “oil of gladness”—that is, the Holy Spirit—was pictured by the holy anointing oil of the Tabernacle and the Temple that was used to anoint the prophets, priests and kings. How wonderfully the effect of Jesus’ anointing was described by the prophet, when he wrote: “The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear [reverence] of the LORD.”—Isa. 11:2

The apostle associates the thought of “gladness” with the anointing which Jesus received, and in the Greek text the thought is of supreme happiness and rejoicing. Such could not help but be the result of having been so highly honored by his Heavenly Father, not because he was exalted above his “fellows,” but because he was considered worthy to be honored to such degree.

VERSE 10—“And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands.” Here Jesus is referred to as Lord. “The beginning” here mentioned seems to be a reference to the beginning of God’s dealings with man—that is, when he was created and given a home “eastward in Eden.” (Gen. 2:8) Evidently this passage also refers to the rules and regulations for human society as given to Adam in the Garden of Eden. This arrangement between man and his Creator was one of perfection

and peace, of sweet fellowship in beauty of thought, word, and deed.

The foundations of human society were also laid there, of family and fraternal relationships. They were based on justice and love, foundations upon which the human race could have built a social structure as wholesome and sweet as that of heaven. Indeed, the people could have delighted in the unfolding wonders with which their Creator had filled the earth.

However, Solomon said, "God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions." (Eccles. 7:29) Selfishness and sin crept in; suggestions from the father of lies, the prince of darkness, twisted and distorted every one of those gracious arrangements God and his Son had instituted, until all that is now left is a sad travesty of what might have been.

VERSES 11,12—"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." The literal earth "abideth for ever." God "created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited." (Eccles. 1:4; Isa. 45:18) The symbolic heavens and earth which came into being subsequent to man's fall into sin have been controlled largely by Satan, the prince of this "present evil world."—Gal. 1:4

However, with the establishment of the "new heaven and a new earth," these present symbolic heavens and earth will pass away. (Rev. 21:1; II Pet. 3:7,12,13) They shall perish because they are unfit for the glorious things of the future. Being full of

unspeakable iniquity, they have no place in the pure and holy arrangements of the coming kingdom of Christ. The illustration of a worn garment suggests that originally, when first created, these symbolic heavens and earth were useful, but now are only fit to be discarded.

“But thou remainest.” The now exalted Son of God has been continuously and consistently righteous throughout the ages, so there is no need that he be set aside as Jehovah’s honored servant. Regardless of how many other changes may be made in the divine arrangements, Jesus will ever remain the one closest to his Heavenly Father in trust, in honor, and in authority.

Hebrews 1:10-12 is a quotation of Psalm 102:24-28. These words of the psalmist are suggested as prophetic of the prayer given by Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. In the answer to that prayer, Jesus was assured by the Father that the present evil order that was clamoring for his life would perish and be discarded as waste material, but he would “endure” and his years would “have no end.”—vss. 26,27

VERSES 13,14—“But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” Here the reference is unmistakably angelic beings. To none of these had God ever extended the astounding invitation to sit at his right hand, but it had been addressed prophetically to his Son. (Ps. 110:1) Thus the Son’s superiority to all other servants of God becomes obvious, and the Apostle Paul

proves that Jesus indeed is the greatest being of all next to the Father.

However, the angels have a high and honorable service to perform. They are “ministering spirits,” rendering special service to the “heirs of salvation.” Here we see a reference to the “fellows” of verse 9, those who are to share the inheritance and exalted office of the Son, and who are so important in the divine arrangement that the holy angels are sent forth to serve them.—Gal. 3:28,29

There will always be ministering angels, and sometimes human messengers and servants, to aid and assist wherever the Almighty directs, but their chief mission now is to help in the present great work of developing the footstep followers of Christ. Glorious, wonderful, and beautiful spirit beings are these, who during the Messianic kingdom will earn the loving attachment, respect, and admiration of the entire race of mankind. Thus, all God’s created beings will be knit together in mutual love and service. In this arrangement, Jesus will be the greatest of all! ■