



## The Pre-eminence and Perfection of Jesus Christ Hebrews 1 and 2

### Introduction

The Book of Hebrews presents Jesus Christ in His excellence and superiority over all others. The purpose is to encourage and exhort believers, overwhelmed and wavering, to endure their pressures, or as we might say, "to hang in there". Such an exhortation is necessary today just as it was in the first century when Jewish Christians were separated from Gentile Christians by their culture, ostracized by their Hebrew families, and doubly oppressed by the Romans because they were both Jews and Christians. It is understandable that they would be tempted to doubt the validity of their faith in Christ and return to Judaism and relative security.

As in every generation since then, we too need the message of Hebrews. We, too, have pressures which lead to doubt and the desire to retreat because of atheistic scientists, humanistic educators, materialistic politicians, and unconverted relatives. Hebrews helps us to persevere with Christ.

Chapters 1-10 emphasize the pre-eminence and priesthood of Jesus our Lord. This strengthens our faith in Him. Chapters 11-13 give us practical help in daily living for Christ. In chapters 1-10, Jesus is compared to the best there was in Judaism, and Judaism was the best there was until Christ, for it alone of all other systems was God-given. In chapters 1 and 2, Jesus is presented as better than the revered prophets and better than those supernatural, heavenly beings, angels.

### Outline of Chapters 1 and 2

- I. The Pre-eminence of Jesus Christ - Hebrews 1:1 - 2:8
- II. The Perfection of Jesus Christ - Hebrews 2:10-18

#### I. Pre-eminence of Jesus Christ - Hebrews 1:1 - 2:8

##### A. Over the Prophets - Hebrews 1:1-3

###### 1. As God's Final Word to Man - 1:1-2a

*God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son... (1:1).*

##### a. Former revelation through prophets

Before Jesus came, God revealed Himself and His will through individuals called Prophets.

Moses was the first (Luke 24:27), followed by Joshua, Samuel, David, Solomon, Ezra, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, the twelve minor prophets, and a few others such as Enoch (Genesis 5:24; Jude 14), Deborah (Judges 5:1), Hannah (1 Samuel 2:1), Asaph, in the Psalms, Nehemiah, and Daniel. They wrote the Hebrew Scriptures, which we call the Old Testament. Overall, the prophets were revered by the Jews. Peter called them holy men, set apart by God for the special task of giving out God's word (2 Peter 1:21). They were anointed for the prophetic office. We too are grateful to them for God's word in the Old Testament. They form a common foundation for Jew and Christian (Ephesians 2:19-20).

Jesus tells of their replacement by Himself in the parable of a man who planted a vineyard (Luke 20:9-16), leased it to some caretakers and went away. Later he sent a servant to the tenants but they beat him, so he sent another servant whom they also beat. Likewise, he sent a third with the same result. The frustrated owner then decided to send his son. The wicked tenants recognized him as the heir and forced him out and killed him. In this parable the servants represent the prophets sent from God. The vineyard is Israel and the tenants are the Pharisees, who were self-proclaimed spiritual leaders (Luke 20:19). They professed to revere God's prophets, however, they proved to be the hypocritical descendants of those who had rejected and killed the prophets, for they rejected and killed Jesus also. Yet it was He who was God's Word to them.

##### b. Final revelation through Jesus Christ

The author of Hebrews begins with a most startling comparison of Jesus to the holy prophets. For although they were infallible when exercising their office (Deuteronomy 12:32), (one mistake disqualified them, Deuteronomy 18:20,22), they delivered the infallible, inerrant word of God, and their service was indispensable and unimpeachable. Nevertheless, their role came to an end. The last prophetic voice was stilled four hundred years before Jesus came. God was silent for four centuries. Then the silence was broken and He spoke through His Son. With the writings of the apostles concerning Him, in the New Testament, the revelation is complete. No more is needed, no more has come or will come. God has spoken to us by His Son. Do you give the words of Jesus the highest priority in your life? Do you receive them as God's words to you? Do you receive Jesus as God's Word to you? How much time per day do you give to His word? Will you consider reading His whole revelation throughout the year?

## 2. A sevenfold superiority - Hebrews 1:2b-3

It is Jesus who will inherit all the works of humanity as well as the vast universe including whatever ground and airspace is controlled or dominated by the devil.

- a. *Appointed heir of all things* (Romans 8:17).
- b. *Through whom also He made the worlds* (John 1:3).

All things were made by Him. Also, the Trinity cooperated in sharing the creation of the universe (Genesis 1:1,2,27). "The worlds" can also mean "the ages" which speaks of God's grand plan. Christ the Son is equally the Creator with God the Father.

- c. *Being the brightness of His glory* (Matthew 19:28)

The brightness is also the radiance of God's ineffable glory which defies description. Jesus is the consistent, stable shining brilliance as the shining of the sun.

- d. *The express image of His Person* - Colossians 1:15

Jesus is the exact image of God. *He who has seen Me hath seen the Father.* (John 14:9).

- e. *Upholding all things by the word of His power* - Colossians 1:17

Jesus is the "glue" that holds everything together. Physicists tell us that there is a force like gravity that holds the neutrons and protons of the atom in place. The Bible said it first.

- f. *By Himself purged our sins* - Hebrews 1:3

Alone and singlehandedly Jesus defeated Satan, paid the penalty for the sins of the world and was the all-sufficient sacrifice.

- g. *Sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high* - Ephesians 1:20

After His vicarious death and victorious resurrection, Jesus ascended far above all principalities and powers to be enthroned at the right hand of God the Father. *Lift up your heads, O you gates... and the King of Glory shall come in* (Psalm 24:7). *God has highly exalted Him* (Philippians 2:9-11).

Will you give Him today His rightful place in your heart and life?

## B. Over the angels - Hebrews 1:4-13

## 1. Angels as supernatural servants of God

Even as Jesus is superior to God's earthly servants, the prophets, so He is superior to God's heavenly servants, the angels (1:14).

Those mysterious, supernatural beings who belong to another realm of existence and another category of being are also God's servants. They are created but not mortal, are extremely strong and powerful, and carry out God's will (Psalm 103:20). No one could reasonably be called better than they.

## 2. Christ's sevenfold superiority

The author gives seven ways in which Jesus is superior to the angels and backs each with scripture.

## a. A more excellent name - Hebrews 1:4

His name is Jesus, the name above every name (Philippians 2:9-10).

## b. God's Son

He has inherited the name of Son from God the Father. No one can be a son by his own choice. He becomes a son by the will of a father. In the councils of eternity, in the Trinity, God the Father called the second person of the Trinity "Son": *You are My Son, today I have begotten You* (Psalm 2:7). *Begotten* does not mean He had a beginning. It means a uniqueness, one of a kind, like God because He is God, yet a person as a Son who is separate from the person of the Father. No angel has that distinction. To be the supernatural Son is superior to being a supernatural servant.

*I will be to Him a Father and He shall be to Me a Son* (2 Samuel 7:14) was spoken by God concerning Solomon but is quoted here as referring to Christ. We learn that by the Holy Spirit's inspiration, Christ is referred to in the Old Testament more than one realizes. As Augustine said, "The New is in the Old concealed, the Old is by the New revealed."

c. *Begotten*, not created - Hebrews 1:5

See discussion b., above. Angels are a created order of beings.

d. *Angels of God worship Him* - Hebrews 1:6

Psalm 97:7 is quoted from the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament from the Hebrew. It was the version used by Jesus and the Jews of His day.

- e. *Your throne...a scepter...your kingdom* - Hebrews 1:7-10

Angels are *spirits* and *a flame of fire* but Jesus has a throne, a scepter of righteousness and a kingdom. His kingdom at present is a kingdom of the heart, but it will one day also be an earthly kingdom superseding all other kingdoms (Revelation 11:15).

- f. *You remain...Your years will not fail* - Hebrews 1:11-12

Even though the heavens are the work of His hands (1:10) they are not eternal but will one day be rolled up like a scroll (Isaiah 34:4, 50:9).

*They will all grow old like a garment* agrees with the second law of thermodynamics, which says that everything is wearing out and running down. Jesus, on the other hand, is eternal, ageless, and always the same (13:8). He cannot and will not change.

- g. At God's Right hand - Hebrews 1:13

Psalm 110:1 is quoted: *The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand, til I make your enemies your footstool.* This Psalm is quoted in the New Testament more than any other Psalm. Jesus used it Himself to silence His enemies, who are, incidentally, mentioned in the Psalm (Matthew 22:44). Angels were not invited to sit at God's right hand. They are before the throne. Jesus is on the throne.

Finally, in verse 14, angels minister to *those who will inherit salvation*, an order of being separate from themselves. Chapter 2 shows that Christ came to minister to them as one of them.

### C. Danger of Drifting through Neglect - Hebrews 2:1-4

#### 1. Neglect of God's Word

The author interrupts the flow to give the first of five warnings which are scattered throughout the book, the danger of drifting. This danger is always present but difficult to recognize immediately. There are no warning signs. One does not have to do anything to drift. It happens through neglect. We can avoid this ever present danger only by doing something. The author includes him or herself by saying *We must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard or they will slip from us.* Peter says, *...be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure and, I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know them...* (2 Peter 1:10,12).

Is drifting a danger for you? Are you less eager than you once were for prayer, to witness, to memorize scripture, to attend church, to volunteer your service for the glory of God? Are you less involved with Christians, less interested in being challenged? Back to the Bible is always where we need to go. God's word is always fresh and stimulating.

#### 2. Spoken through angels

Angels had something to do with the giving of the law through Moses (Acts 7:53). Jesus brought us the words of salvation (John 6:63). If we neglect his words we are in more danger than even those who were under the law, which carried the penalty of death.

#### 3. Neglect despite signs and wonders

Just as signs, wonders, and miracles accompanied the giving of the law, so God authenticated the words of Jesus and added the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

### D. Over Angels as Son of Man - Hebrews 2:5-8

In Hebrews 1, Jesus' superiority over angels is through His deity as Son of God. In the second chapter it is through His humanity. He is superior to angels as the Son of Man.

#### 1. Dominion Given to Mankind - Psalm 8

In Psalm 8 man is extolled for his God-given dominion, yet he is insignificant when compared to the heavens, made lower than the angels, and still crowned with glory and honor! The incongruity is that even though God put all things under his feet, we do not see all things under his feet, or control. Indeed, many things are out of control, others are barely under control. In the environment, in society, among nations, in education and science, something is very wrong. When we look at man we see chaos and failure. Man still wants to run his own show, but does not know how to do it right. Man has fallen even lower than his original position under the angels.

#### 2. Dominion belongs to Jesus - Hebrews 2:9a

*But we see Jesus.* He became visible as man. He who created all things chose to become *a little lower than the angels*, that is, human. He entered into His creation like one of His created beings. In so doing, He entered the realm of suffering and death. It is as a man that we now see Him *crowned with glory and honor*. As an analogy, would you and I be willing to become a grasshopper so that grasshoppers could be elevated, or "saved"?

## II. The Perfection of Jesus Christ - Hebrews 2:9b-18

### A. Process - Through Becoming Human - Hebrews 2:9b-18

His manhood led to suffering and death. We are told that He intended to *taste death for everyone*. Jesus so pitied us in our lost, death-deserving, doomed condition that He volunteered to take our penalty and suffer it in our place. With the penalty of spiritual death paid for us, we need only walk through physical death into life eternal. Jesus removed the sting of death for those who believe. One generation of us will not even experience the physical death (1 Thessalonians 4:17). You and I could be that generation.

### B. Purpose - Fivefold - Hebrews 2:9b-18

1. *That He might taste death for everyone.*
2. *To bring many sons, human beings, to glory* – Hebrews 2:10.

He wants us to live with Him forever in His home.

3. To sanctify us and make us one with Him (Hebrews 2:11).

Sanctification refers to being set apart for Himself and His use. It is a life-long process. When it is complete, He will take us home. Holiness is another word for sanctification. *Be holy for I am holy* means He wants us to be like Him (Leviticus 20:7).

### 4. *To destroy...the devil* - Hebrews 2:14

The devil's deadly power, which kept us captives to the fear of death, is broken (Hebrews 2:14). Through His own death, Jesus crushed and bound Satan (Genesis 3:15). As a result, his power is limited and we are freed. Death and sin have no more dominion over us (Romans 6:2).

### 5. That He might be our great High Priest - Hebrews 2:17-18

He qualified as High Priest by being:

- a. Made like us in all things
- b. Merciful toward us
- c. Faithful toward God
- d. Tempted

These purposes could only be accomplished by Jesus' leaving heaven's glory and becoming a man. He was perfect at each stage of His earthly journey. He was never less than perfect. However, as a man, His perfection was demonstrated through suffering in a way He had not experienced before.

His suffering, submission, and overcoming enables Him to help us in our suffering and need. He alone is perfectly qualified to be our Great High Priest.

## Application

Will you come to Him now for help, for strength and courage in temptation, for mercy, for wisdom, for comfort, for endurance in trial, for acceptance of your present circumstances? He is able to help you. He is waiting for you to call upon Him. When will you respond?