

Hebrews Chapter One

In the first chapter of Hebrews we are told that Jesus is superior to the angels. This is an important concept because the Hebrews, (also known as Jews and Israelites) believed that God engraved the two tablets of stone given to Moses through angels. Stephen said that the Jews received the law from angels (Acts 7:53) and Paul said the law was appointed by angels (Galatians 3:19). The writer of the book says that Jesus was superior to the very origin of the law.

Introduction to the book of Hebrews

Who wrote the book? Many people believe that Paul was the author, although the book does not bear many of the characteristics of other books written by the apostle. Tertullian, an early Christian theologian believed Barnabas was the author. Martin Luther favored Apollos while John Calvin argued for Luke.

Other possibilities are Silas, Aquila, Mark, Timothy, Clement of Rome, Peter, Jude, Stephen, Priscilla, Epaphras, Philip, and even Mary, the mother of Jesus. While this writer believes that Paul was indeed the author, this should not be a point of contention. Whoever wrote the book had to be a person intimately familiar with the Old Testament scriptures and the life of the Jewish community. I believe that Origen, a Christian theologian writing in the early 3rd Century was correct when he said of the authorship of the book, "Only God knows".

When was the book written? Just as the authorship of the book is in question, so also is the date of writing. Most commentators agree that the book must have been written before 70 A.D. since this was the date of the destruction of Jerusalem by the

Roman general Titus. As the book makes no mention of this momentous event, it is believed that the book predates the destruction.

Also, commentators are generally agreed that the book had to be written before the year 96 A.D. because Clement of Rome (a bishop of the church) quoted extensively from the book in his epistle (1 Clement). The similarities and quotations in 1 Clement lead some to believe that Clement was the author of Hebrews.

The book is believed by many to have been written during the persecution of the church perpetrated by Nero, Emperor of Rome during the time period 64-70 A.D. Whatever the date, the book was certainly written during the 1st Century and was received by the church as part of the canon of scripture.

To whom was the book written? This question is easier to answer. I believe that the book was written for three primary audiences: 1) Jewish Christians, who were facing persecution from other Jews following their conversion to Christianity; 2) non-Christian Jews; and 3) non-Jewish believers. The book is intended to strengthen the faith of Jewish Christians, address the opposition of non-Christian Jews, and provide explanations concerning the Old Testament law and faith to those who had little or no exposure to the teachings of the Old Testament.

God's Revelation through Jesus (verses 1-4)

God spoke in various times and places, especially through the agency of prophets. This is attested to by Peter (2 Peter 1:20-21 and 2 Peter 3:2). But, while God spoke in many different ways in the past, He now speaks only through His Son.

The reason that we should listen to Jesus is because God has made Him heir of all things and made the worlds through Him (Genesis 1:26 and John 1:1-3). Jesus is of the

same background and substance of God. Jesus, though He is God, purged our sins and sat down at the right hand of His Father. As a result of these facts the writer informs us that Jesus is better than the angels. He has a better inheritance and a more excellent name.

Jesus Exalted (verses 5-13)

In verse five the writer quotes from Psalm 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14 and asks whether God ever referred to the angels as His Son. In verse 6 the writer quotes from Psalm 97:7 and shows that the angels were to worship the Son. In verse seven the writer quotes from Psalm 104:4 in describing the angels as spirits. In verses eight and nine the writer quotes from Psalms 45:6-7 again showing the superiority of the Son over the angels. In verses 10-12 the writer quotes from Psalm 102:25-27 showing the role of Jesus in creation. In verse 13 the writer quotes from Psalm 110:1 asking when God ever said for the angels to sit at His right hand.

In all of these passages the writer shows great familiarity with the Old Testament scriptures. The writer uses these passages to provide evidence of the superiority of Jesus over the angels. In the final verse of chapter One the author shows the unique mission of angels.

Angels minister (verse 14)

While angels are inferior to Jesus they do have a unique mission in the plan of God. Verse 14 tells us that they are sent by God to minister to those who will inherit eternal salvation. This would include all faithful Christians, both of the 1st Century and also of the 21st.

Angels have been very active in the lives of humans. In Genesis 16:7 an angel assisted Hagar. In Genesis 19:16 an angel brought Lot out of the city of Sodom. In Genesis 22:11 an angel prevented Abraham from offering Isaac upon the altar.

In Exodus 14:19 the angel of God protected the Israelites from the armies of Egypt. In Exodus 23:20 God promised an angel to keep the Israelites in the right way. In 1 Kings 19:5 an angel assisted Elijah the prophet. In Daniel 3:28 King Nebuchadnezzar praised God who sent an angel to deliver Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace. In Daniel 6:22 Daniel was saved from the mouth of the lion by an angel.

In Mark 1:13 angels came to Jesus in the wilderness and ministered to him. In Luke 16:22 Jesus said that angels carried the beggar into Abraham's bosom following his death. In Acts 5:19 an angel freed the apostles from prison. In Acts 12:7 an angel freed Peter from prison and in Acts 27:23 Paul reported that an angel spoke to him assuring him that no one would be harmed in a shipwreck.

From these and many other passages we see that angels have a very unique mission, even for our day. However, Jesus is portrayed in chapter one as being superior to the angels.