

Dear Group Leaders and Hosts,

This past Sunday I spoke on Jesus' superiority to the angels from Hebrews 1:4-14. I provided a handout (attached) of the entire chapter to review the previous week (verses 1-3) and also to highlight the emphasis on angels in verses 4-14. Angels have a considerable role in the story of Scripture and were part of both the Exodus (Exodus 14:19) and the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai (Acts 7:30,38; cf. Hebrews 2:2). Remember the author is writing to Hebrew Christians facing persecution as Christians; they could revert to being Jews and avoid suffering. So the letter starts off with seven amazing descriptions of Jesus in verses 1-3 followed by this assertion of Jesus' superiority to the angels in verses 4-14. Jesus is better so don't turn from the greater to the lesser! To make his argument that Jesus is superior to angels, the author supplies seven quotations from the Old Testament.

The first quotation (Psalm 2:7) is "For to which of the angels did God ever say, 'You are my Son, today I have become your Father'?" God has a special relationship with Israel's King, a relationship like that of a royal father with his son. God never uses such language to describe any angel being.

The second quotation (2 Samuel 7:14) is "Or again, 'I will be his Father, and he will be my Son'?" This quotation is spoken by God through the prophet Nathan to David. David wanted to build a house for God but God declares instead that he will build David's house and that it would last forever. Here again we have the Davidic King in a special covenant relationship with God, a relationship of promise and blessing. There is nothing like this for any angel(s).

The third quotation (Deuteronomy 32:43) is "And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him.'" This quotation is much more difficult and nuanced as it is quoting the Septuagint (designated by "LXX") which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. Our Bibles are translated out of the Masoretic (Hebrew) text of the Old Testament; alternate readings, such as found in the LXX, can be found in the textual notes at the bottom of the page in your Bible. Hopefully that doesn't confuse you but the basic idea of the quote is clear: the angels worship God's "firstborn", his chosen King. Firstborn indicates right to succession, the right to rule.

The fourth quotation (Psalm 104:4) is "In speaking of angels he says, 'He makes his angels spirits, and his servants flames of fire.'" Here again the point is clear. The angels are spoken of as servants or messengers of God. This is their role; it is below that of the anointed Davidic King (Jesus!).

The fifth quotation (Psalm 45:6,7) is "But about the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice 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.'" Here the Davidic king is addressed as God! This is not unprecedented; earthly kings were called "gods" (ex: Psalm 82) because of their role in

God's stead. The main point again is the special relationship between the king and God, a relationship that is superior to God's relationship with angels.

The sixth quotation (Psalm 102:25-27) is "He also says, 'In the beginning, LORD (Yahweh), 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.'" This quote is remarkable because it applies to Jesus a text describing God (LORD; Yahweh). However it is consistent with the statement in Hebrews 1:2 that through Jesus God made the universe (or ages). Jesus is not only called God (Psalm 45) but also actions of Yahweh are attributed to King Jesus!

The seventh quotation (Psalm 110:1) is "To which of the angels did God ever say, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'?" This final quote is powerful because there is no more exalted place than the right hand of God. So King Jesus is exalted above all things, including angels (cf. Philippians 2:9-11 applying Isaiah 45:23ff to Jesus!).

The author concludes his argument by stating "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation." King Jesus, the author of salvation, is served by angels, not subject to them. Stick with Jesus!

I ended the sermon by pointing out that King Jesus (Christ or Messiah means King) is the fulfillment of a long and rich story, the story of Israel and even of humanity. Jesus isn't simply an avatar or great teacher who is influential in his person but not connected to something greater. Jesus is the answer to all the promises of God (2 Corinthians 1:20); he is the fulfillment of over 300 prophecies/promises, most notably as the Davidic King and suffering servant. His story is the story! There are competitors: the story of no god (Darwin/evolution/materialism); the story of all-is-god (pantheism; Star Wars force, new age movement); the story of many gods (Ancient Near East, Greek pantheon, Hinduism), the story of one God (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). Islam means "submission" and Allah demands submission. Judaism also demands submission but it must be heart felt and not simply external but witnesses to humanity's failure at the heart level. Christianity claims to deal with the heart and bring about true heart felt submission. and this is first realized within God as the Son submits to the Father in love, empowered by the Spirit. God goes before us to make the way for us so that God's Kingdom come meaningfully come to earth; God ruling through us by our loving submission bring justice and true righteousness. This is what Jesus Christ has pioneered and guaranteed! He is worth dying for. Don't give up on Jesus; allow his story to be yours, and yours his.

Discussion Guide for "engage" portion of your meeting.

This is a lot to handle but I would suggest first remembering angel stories in Scripture to get everyone thinking about angels. Then consider the point being made about the superiority of King Jesus to the angels. Any questions about the quotations or role of kingship? Does it make sense? We will encounter more of this in chapter 2. I would then discuss the story of Scripture.

How well does your group grasp the story? Do they know the Old Testament story of Israel, especially of the exile and promises of God changing their hearts when bringing them back in Ezekiel (36) and Jeremiah (29-32)? Is your group familiar with other aspects of the storyline, most notably that of the suffering servant of Isaiah 53 (cf. Isaiah 42, 49, 50)? His suffering is also typified in the Passover. The more we know the story and of Jesus place in the story, the stronger our faith and confidence will be in him as the true Savior of the World. Read the story! Discuss the story! There are competing storylines, but none has the power and clarity and truthfulness of his!

Thanks for your patience in reading this long email.

blessings,
Pastor Dan