

A Study in Hebrews

Study One Hebrews 1:2-18

Day One

1:1 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,

2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.

4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

vs. 1&2 – The main message to the Hebrew reader was that the revelation of Christ was God's most authoritative and final message. This letter was written to Hebrews who were not new to the faith, but who were obviously discouraged and questioning their decision to trust Jesus. The writer was urging them *not* to return to their former way of life, but to see Jesus as a prophetic revelation from God that was consistent with and superior to past revelations from God.

Jesus was and is the message from God. Everything is from Him and about Him. John wrote:

Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made (John 1:3).

And again John wrote:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14).

Jesus is the Word and a Word is all about communication. So God the Father has spoken through His Son, the Word. The writer was urging the Hebrews not to consider another Word, for Jesus was it. Period.

vs. 3&4 – Since Jesus is in heaven, He is also superior to the angels. No vision or revelation about angels can ever surpass the greatness of His majesty. No angel can radiate the glory of God like Jesus could and does. Jesus is the exact representation of the Father. I will not go into the Greek words used here, but it is clear that Jesus is of the same essence with the Father but a unique Person all the same.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Colossians 1:15-18).

For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority (Colossians 2:9-11).

Jesus had a specific purpose in coming to earth and that was to provide purification for sins. Once He did that, He sat down at the right hand of God, symbolic of His great power and the honor ascribed to Him.

Is Jesus the focal point of your worship and attention? He should be. Don't let *any* doctrine, movement, fad, vision, denomination or teaching take the place that only Jesus should have in your life. There can be no question that the writer saw Jesus as preeminent over all, deserving of the highest praise and honor. The implication to a Jewish believer would have been clear: How can you consider going back to Judaism in light of this tremendous revelation of Christ?

Day Two

5 For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my Son"?
6 And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."
7 In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire."
8 But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom."

v. 5 – Here the writer quoted Psalm 2:7, which Paul also quoted during his sermon in Acts 13:

"We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm: 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father'" (Acts 13:32-33).

This raises an interesting point. Some referred to Jesus as the Son of God in His earthly ministry. It seems that Paul considered this Sonship to have been confirmed or revealed not at Jesus birth, but at His resurrection! While Jesus birth took place in obscurity, His resurrection took place more publicly, with many people seeing Jesus after His resurrection. It is His death and resurrection, not His birth, which established that Jesus was God's Son. I find that interesting.

v. 6 – While it seems that the writer was referring to Jesus’ birth at this point, it appears to be a bit of a bad translation here. Without getting technical, this verse also seems to point to Jesus’ resurrection, where the Father brought Him back into the “living world” after death. It would make more sense for this to be true, given the preceding verses.

It is not quite clear what Old Testament verse the writer was referring to in this case. Perhaps Psalm 97:7

All who worship images are put to shame, those who boast in idols — worship him, all you gods!

On occasion, you will find a verse in the New Testament that doesn’t quite match the verse as it is found in the Old Testament. That is probably because the New Testament writer was quoting from what is called the Septuagint—the ancient Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. The Greek Septuagint is a translation “once removed” from the original Hebrew and that does affect the interpretation. But don’t worry, the basic meaning is the same and just highlights the problems that translators have always faced: How to translate exactly from one language to another when some words and concepts don’t exist in the “receptor” language.

The writer simply continued establishing Jesus as superior to any angel.

v. 7 – The writer quoted Psalm 104:4 here, showing that the angels were simply God’s messengers. They could not be equated to or elevated beyond Christ.

v. 8 – Here the writer referred to Psalm 45:6, which was a Messianic passage as historically interpreted by the Jews. Whoever wrote this letter, had a familiarity with the Old Testament and Jewish religious customs and culture. We cannot appreciate how the writer was touching the Jewish mind and heart with these last few verses. This was certainly a Hebrew writing to Hebrews.

Day Three

9 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."

10 He also says, "In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.

11 They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment.

12 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."

13 To which of the angels did God ever say, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"?

14 Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?

v. 9 – This verse is Psalm 45:7 and is a fascinating statement that the Messiah would be anointed with the “oil of joy.” This could indicate that to be anointed with God’s anointing is a joyful thing or that joy is actually what the anointing is composed of; in other words, the anointing actually imparts joy. Christ is the Greek word for “anointed one” and Messiah is the Hebrew equivalent. So when you say Jesus Christ, you are saying “Jesus the Anointed One.” The anointing was an indication that Jesus was chosen of God, for there was a special aspect to His being—God set His seal of approval on Jesus by gracing Him to do things that He could never do apart from God’s presence in His life:

You know what has happened throughout Judea, beginning in Galilee after the baptism that John preached—how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him (Acts 10:37-38).

What do you do that when you do it, you have joy? That is an indication of what you are anointed to do? Don’t just think in terms of ministry, but in any of life’s activities. I believe that there are anointed artists—people whom God empowers to make art. I think we must expand our understanding of the anointing to go outside ministry in church or in things traditionally thought to be “spiritual.”

vs. 10-12 – Then the writer quoted Psalm 102:25-27. The writer believed that God was responsible for creation as reported in Genesis and equated Jesus with God. He further believed that creation would “wind down” and come to an end, but that God Himself would remain the same. The writer did not believe that creation was God, but an expression of God’s handiwork.

Peter expressed this view on creation when he wrote:

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness (2 Peter 3:10-13).

None of the events of creation’s end cause me concern or fear, for the same God who created everything will create a new heaven and a new earth from what He has already done. I have nothing to fear concerning the end times. Those who write books and make lots of money exploiting the uncertainty and fear of the unknown end times are simple fiction writers who lack any theological context for what they write. Jesus is my Lord. He is the Creator. What do I need to be concerned about?

vs. 13&14 – Obviously the Jews venerated angels. The writer is trying to establish that if they venerated angels, they should all the more worship God’s Son, for He is above the angels in power, authority and splendor. The principle is simple: Don’t put the things of God above God. Don’t be more excited about what God uses to accomplish His will than His will itself. I have known some who were so excited about faith that they talked about faith instead of the God of their faith. There are others who have seen the reality of demons, healing and miracles and made them their study instead of studying the God of those things. Don’t be guilty of this. Keep God supreme in your heart, mind and study.

Day Four

2:1 We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.

2 For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment,

3 how shall we escape if we ignore such a great salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.

4 God also testified to it by signs, wonders and various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

v. 1 – That is good advice even for us today. We must pay more careful attention to what we have heard. Remember that this letter was addressed to believing Jews. Some in this reading audience could have been present on the day of Pentecost. But now they were reconsidering whether what they had heard was worth holding on to. They were reconsidering because of God’s work among the Gentiles and the seeming de-emphasis of the Law and Jewish customs with which they had been raised and were familiar.

It is easy to “drift away” from the exuberance of our initial faith as life presents challenges and unexpected dilemmas. I think this is what John referred to in Revelation:

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place (Revelation 2:4-5).

Have you forsaken your first love? Drifted away? If so, what are prepared to do to reestablish your faith and zeal?

vs. 2&3 – Some believe that the Law was delivered to men through the mediation of angels. This being true, this Law thus delivered was binding on the Jews. Now God’s son has delivered a greater, more important message and it was confirmed with signs and wonders. This message could not be treated casually and could not be abandoned for a message of lesser importance.

v. 4 – Jesus’ ministry was full of “signs and wonders,” but so was the ministry of Peter, John, and Paul. God always provides proof to those who are interested in receiving them.

Those whose hearts are hardened will reject these proofs since they are entrenched in their own way of thinking and acting.

Even after Jesus had done all these miraculous signs in their presence, they still would not believe in him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet: "Lord, who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" (John 12:37-38)

The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade (Acts 5:12-13).

I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me in leading the Gentiles to obey God by what I have said and done-by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit. So from Jerusalem all the way around to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the gospel of Christ (Romans 15:18-20).

It would make sense to me that if this is how God presented the gospel then, He will do the same thing today. These miracles were not an accommodation to the mentality of the people, but a confirmation of God's great love and the importance of the gospel message. I think we should expect and even look for miracles today as confirmation of God's work among the nations.

Day Five

5 It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking.

6 But there is a place where someone has testified: "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"

7 You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor

8 and put everything under his feet." In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him.

v. 5 – The terminology of the world to come appears to be this present age where Christ has been exalted to the right hand of the Father. Even if the writer was referring to the next age, the point remains the same: Christ is superior to any angel, especially the angels who administered the Law.

v. 6-8 – It seems like the writer didn't quite know where the verse was in the Old Testament to which he was referring when he wrote, "Someone has testified." This seems to be a Middle Eastern method of honor and respect when quoting someone great. Here the writer quoted David and Psalm 8:4-6 verbatim from the Septuagint, the Greek

translation of the Hebrew Old Testament. So the writer definitely knew what he was quoting and probably had it in front of him while he was writing.

God has great love for Adam's race of fallen, sinful beings. He has exalted mankind to the head of His creation and has worked through Christ to subject all things to man's dominion, as was originally intended with Adam in the Garden.

Yet the context here does seem to point to Christ and not to mankind in general. For a time, Christ was a little lower than the angels, for He was subject to death as we all are (angels are not mortal and cannot die, so mankind is a little lower than they). All things were placed under Christ, although we see most of humanity and its institutions rebelling against Christ's rule—for now.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5-11).

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way (Ephesians 1:17-23).

I once cut off the head of a snake that was in my neighbor's yard. While that snake was decapitated, it writhed and twisted for a long time after the fact. That is how it is with Creation. It has been subjected to Christ, but it continues to twist and turn in agony, as if it still has a life of its own. But in the fullness of time, it will stop its writhing and take its place under the feet of Christ and His followers.

Day Six

9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

10 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering.

11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.

12 He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises."

v. 9 – What a simple but profound statement. We see Jesus because He came from heaven in human flesh, a man like us in every way except sin. He is now sitting at the right hand of the Father, in honor and glory, having been raised from the dead. Jesus died for everyone, so that all could have access to God by faith. This was an act of God's grace to a fallen race who was in need of a Redeemer and Savior.

This one sentence summarized the Christian faith and presented it to a group of believing Jews who were considering a return to Judaism. The truth could not have been presented in a more clear, concise way. But since the first century, Jews have rejected this truth en masse, stumbling over the suffering Savior model that Jesus presented.

v. 10 – Jesus was not imperfect in any way. Yet His death made Him "complete," in the sense that He had to die to open the way to God for us. And Jesus' suffering enabled Him to experience firsthand the plight of his fallen creatures. Jesus' human experience made Him the "complete" Savior, not just decreeing salvation for His subjects, but earning it for them through His death.

I am always cautious when I am describing issues such as are raised in this verse. I don't want to take away from Jesus' magnificence, perfection or divinity in any way. Personally I find that words sometimes escape me when I try to explain the wonder of God's plan in Christ. I know it must be explained, but I don't feel I am the best one to do that.

v. 11 – Wow! Jesus isn't just my Savior and Redeemer. He is also my elder Brother. We are in the same family! Jesus partook of my flesh so He could become a sacrifice to God for me. Since "my flesh" and "my race" were the problem, Jesus took on that flesh and became part of my race to be a sacrifice from my race to save my race. And now He has made me holy through His sacrifice.

Jesus can identify with whatever problem you are encountering because He has felt what you feel. He felt rejection on the cross; He was even tempted to take a numbing drug while on the cross (which He refused). Yes, Jesus knows pain, sorrow, temptation and grief—just like you and I do. And He knows it because He has been where we are.

That is why we can pray to Him, not as a distant God, but as a brother who knows and is ready to help.

v. 12 – Here the writer quoted Psalm 22:2. It was God’s plan all along for Jesus to become like “His brothers” so that, under one God and Father, a family of believers could declare God’s matchless praise. Why would anyone want to abandon this family, unless religious tradition had so misinterpreted who and what the Messiah would be that they now, in disillusionment, considered a return to the dead but predictable and culturally acceptable Jewish traditions?

The writer made the choices clear: a living Messiah who created a family under God’s Fatherhood, or a dead religion that bound people together in lifeless form and tradition. In some ways, the choice is the same today even for those who consider themselves part of the Christian tradition. Do you want to be part of a family or part of a religious system? Do you want a living relationship or an institution full of tradition but void of life?

Day Seven

13 And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again he says, "Here am I, and the children God has given me."

14 Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—
15 and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.

16 For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants.

17 For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people.

18 Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

v. 13 – Whoever wrote this letter, and it is my opinion that the Apostle Paul at least collaborated with someone in writing it, certainly knew the Old Testament. They just ran off a series of verses, all of which were considered Messianic verses by the Jews—passages that spoke of the Messiah to come. The writer was making his case that Jesus was this Messiah, reminding these believing Hebrews that they had chosen to believe in God’s choice, God’s Anointed One. Here the writer referenced Psalm 18:2 and Isaiah 8:18.

There is so much value in knowing Scripture. I urge you to learn, study, enroll in Bible classes and do all you can to know the Word.

vs. 14-18 – Who could ever conceive of God, taking on the form of his creation, suffering and dying so that his creation could be set free. What a magnificent plan. What we could not do for ourselves, God did for us. As mentioned earlier, Jesus became like us in every way but sin. I heard a preacher say once that our flesh sits at the right hand of God! Jesus sits in heaven and intercedes for us, represents us well, because He is one of us!

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Because Jesus is a man, He understands temptation, and that enables you and me to go to Him for help. I am always surprised by how many people run from God when they are tempted and even when they sin. I try to make it my practice to run to Him in those times, not from Him. What direction are you running in right now? Toward Him or away from Him? I urge you to make Jesus your refuge, your strong tower, your strength, and your source of help in every and any situation.