

## Hebrews 1: The Superiority of the Son

One of the key words of the book of Hebrews is the word “better”. This word is used 12 times in the epistle, for the most part demonstrating how that Messiah is “better” than the ordinances and sacrifices of the Mosaic legal code. Chapter 1 introduces this theme in three particulars, demonstrating the superiority of the Son in:

- 1) The manner by which the Word of God came through him,
- 2) The way in which he is “made” better than the Angels, and
- 3) His future dominion and inheritance

The opening words of Hebrews chapter 1 describes how:

“God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in times past unto the fathers by the prophets, 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” (Heb. 1:1-2).

Here, we find that God spoke to “the fathers” at different times in their history, and also in many different ways. But in the last days prior to AD70 and the overthrow of the Temple system, God spoke directly to them by his Son. This position is further exemplified in Messiah’s Parable of the wicked husbandmen. In this parable, a certain man planted a vineyard, and let it out to husbandmen, whilst he departed into a far country:

“and when the time of the fruit drew near, he sent his servants to the husbandmen, that they might receive the fruits of it. And the husbandmen took his servants, and beat one, and killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent other servants more than the first: and they did unto them likewise” (Mat. 21:33-36).

Here, we have a graphic depiction of how the prophets were sent, yet were abused and put to death: their message went unheeded, and no fruit was provided to the landowner. But then, he sent his heir – his only Son:

“But last of all, he sent unto them his son, saying, They will reverence my son. But when the husbandmen saw the son, they said among themselves, **This is the heir**; come, let us kill him, and let us seize on his inheritance. And they caught him, and cast him out of the vineyard”

So it was that “last of all” the Son of God was sent to the husbandmen as a final appeal. Yet they rejected him also, and so rendered themselves liable to judgment for what they had done. Hebrews chapter 1 picks up on this, speaking of how in the “last days” the Son was sent to speak the message of Yahweh direct to the people. Yet these days truly were the “last” for Judah’s commonwealth, as shortly afterwards the Temple and City of Jerusalem were destroyed at the hands of the Roman army, as described in the later verses of this chapter.

Part of the greatness of Messiah, as mentioned in the parable, is that he was “appointed heir of all things”. The allusion here is to Isaac, the son of promise (cp. Rom. 9:7-8). He foreshadowed the coming Messiah in various particulars, including being offered as a sacrifice, and being raised in a figure (Heb. 11:19). Of Isaac it was said by Abraham’s servant: “Sarah my master’s wife bare a son to my master when he was old: and unto him hath he given all that he hath” (Gen. 24:36). And again, “... Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac” (Gen. 25:5). Isaac was Abraham’s heir of all that he had, and Messiah likewise is appointed the heir “of all things”

Hebrews chapter 1 continues to describe the greatness of Messiah by stating that he came as the brightness of the Divine Image:

“... 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 ...” (Heb. 1:3).

The allusion here, is back to Genesis chapter 1, where we read that the first human pair were made “in the image of God” (Gen. 1:26, 27). Adam failed to retain the moral likeness of his Creator, but Jesus showed forth his Father’s Glory and Likeness. He was the Word “made flesh” (Jno. 1:14), full of grace and truth:

“... and the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the father, full of grace and truth” (Jno. 1:14).

He was “the true light” (vs 9), as the brightness of his Father’s glory. Through him, and the glorious gospel he preached, we behold the Divine Image which men of the world are blinded to:

“... if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest **the light of the glorious gospel of Christ**, who is **the image of God**, should shine unto them ... For God who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give **the light** of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4:4, 6).

#### **SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF YAHWEH**

Again, by way of describing the Son’s exalted status, we are told that: “when he had by himself purged our sins, **he sat down** on the right hand of the Majesty on high; being made so much better than the angels ...” (Heb. 1:3-4).

There is a detail here, that is easy to read over: The Son is seated: “he sat down ...” being better than the angels. Ordinarily, Angels are mostly portrayed as standing in divine service (except for the two who sat in the empty sepulchre – Jno. 20:12). Hence, the Angel of Yahweh described them to Zechariah as “these that stand by” (Zech. 3:7). Again, the priests had no throne to sit upon (except for faithless Eli who sat on one by the Tabernacle entrance) – but Messiah does sit in his Father’s presence. This contrast is again brought out in Hebrews 10:

“ ... and every priest **standeth** daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, **sat down** on the right hand of God ...” (Heb. 10:11-12).

The posture of *sitting* indicates the completion of his sacrificial work, whereas *standing* is a posture ready for action. There is an interesting reference to Messiah in Daniel 12, where he is portrayed as Standing once again:

“at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people ...” (Dan. 12:1).

Notice that here, Michael is “the great prince”, by contrast to the archangel who also bears the name of “Michael”, who is only “one of the chief princes” (see Dan. 10:13). Jesus of Nazareth is the Greater

Michael, which name signifies “who is like El” – i.e. the One who bears the Divine Image as we have seen.

The Son, we are told, was “made better than the Angels,” which includes Michael, the name-bearing Angel (Jude 9). Being born of a woman, he was made lower than the Angelic nature, as with all men. Hence Hebrews 2 informs us that “thou hast made him a little lower than the Angels” and again, “we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death ...” But because of his loving obedience to performing his Father’s Will, he is now exalted, “... crowned with glory and honour ...” (Heb. 2:7, 9, see Psalm 8:4-5).”

This same pattern is repeated in Paul’s epistle to the Philippians:

“Being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:8-11).

### **CHRIST THE FIRSTBORN**

Continuing to demonstrate the superiority of Jesus above the angels, the Apostle asks the question:

“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? And again, when he bringeth in the first begotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him ...” (Heb. 1:5-6).

The first quotation is from Psalm 2, verse 6, but the begetting referred to here, is not the emergence from the womb of Mary the handmaid of Yahweh. The reference to him as being “the first begotten” gives us a clue: Christ has “become the firstfruits of them that slept ... For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ at his coming” (1 Cor. 15:20-23)

We suggest then, that when the Apostle speaks of Messiah “this day have I begotten thee”, that this is referring to him being the firstborn from the dead. This seems to be confirmed by the further quotation from this Psalm in Acts chapter 13:

“we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the Fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, **in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm**, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee” (Acts 13:32-33).

The Son of God is “the first**born** from the dead” (Col. 1:17), and it is his resurrected glory that is so much better than that held by Angels. Being the beginning of the New Creation, he was raised first, as the “first begotten”, and many sons and daughters will follow.

In his exalted status of being at his Father’s Right Hand, the Son will remain there until his enemies are placed under his feet:

“... but to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, **until I make thine enemies thy footstool?**” (Heb. 1:13)

This theme comes out again in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, which we considered earlier:

“... for he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. But he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him ...” (1 Cor. 15:25-27).

This is Messiah’s future work, for at present we do not see all things put under his feet. Again, we are told in Hebrews 2 of this same aspect, cited above:

“Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownest him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands: Thou hast put all things under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. **But now we see not yet all things put under him.** But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Heb. 2:7-9).

It is written that “unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak” (Heb. 2:5), and so his inherited status makes him greater than they. Being the future ruler of the world, he shall reign from Zion, with the kingdom established in the ancient homeland of Israel, and his dominion extending throughout the entire globe.

But the superiority of the Son is based upon how he embraced righteousness and eschewed sin:

“... Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; **therefore** God, even thy God hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows” (Heb. 1:9)

This is the secret to success: to love righteousness and hate iniquity. To walk uprightly in the sight of the Most High. But notice, that Jesus was so anointed “above thy fellows”, which implies that his “fellows” will also be anointed. The Hebrew word, “Messiah” and the Greek “Christ” mean “anointed” to be king and priest. But Jesus is not “anointed” alone, his “fellows” will be kings and priests ruling over a subdued earth with him. So they shall sing his praises in that day:

“They sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:9-10).

This is the day of coming glory when the great company of the redeemed shall be made up, and those who love Messiah’s appearing will be granted an incorruptible crown of life. Here is a vision of “gladness” and joy, that is set before our eyes in the truths of Scripture. We, therefore, like Messiah, must focus attention upon that joy which is set before us, enduring the trials of this life, so that we shall ultimately be seated with him upon his throne, just as he is seated in the Throne of our Father (Rev. 3:21).

*Christopher Maddocks*