

**HEBREWS 1-3 CHRIST'S SUPERIORITY TO ANGELS, PROPHETS AND MOSES**

The epistle of Hebrews is quite unusual in not having the standard greetings, but it does have the normal ending, as it sends salutations to all.

Although the author does not identify himself, it is very likely it was the apostle Paul, who possessed such special knowledge and wisdom from God (2 Cor. 12:7) as shown in this epistle. The writing style is similar to Luke's elegant letters and tradition says he at times served as Paul's secretary. Also, in Heb. 13:23, Timothy is mentioned as the author's travel companion, again pointing to Paul. It was probably penned from Italy, where Paul spent much time, and Heb. 13:24 says, "those from Italy greet you."

This epistle is directed primarily to Jewish (or the equivalent term, Hebrew) Christians, thus the title of the manuscript says, "To the Hebrews". Since allusions are made to the Temple service, it had to be written some time before the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in A. D. 70. Also, Nero's persecution of the Christians in Rome and other places began in A. D. 64, which meant Christians lost their legal privileges and protection of being regarded as a Jewish sect and some of the *Jewish Christians* then faced increased persecution. It seems some were considering leaving the faith and going back to the relative safety of their Judaism.

So the epistle of Hebrews was written to warn Jewish Christians everywhere who were in danger of apostatizing from the Christian faith and were considering returning to Judaism. It is a key epistle to understand why Christianity became the legitimate faith since Judaism had denied that Jesus was the Christ, or the promised Messiah.

It also shows the superiority of Jesus above all the Old Testament prophets, above all the angels and even of Moses himself, whom Jews considered preeminent in the Old Testament since through him the law of God was given. It also prepares the way to replace the Old Testament sacrificial system and priesthood with the New Testament sacrifice of Christ and a new priesthood and ministry now under the order of Melchizedek.

We begin with words very similar to Gen. 1:1 and John 1:1, "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 to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 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 at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they" (Heb. 1:1-4).

Here are seven characteristics of Jesus Christ showing His superiority to everyone except God the Father: (1) He is appointed as heir of all things, meaning the entire universe; (2) He is the direct Creator of the universe, God the Father giving Him the orders to do so; (3) He emanates the same brightness and glory as God the Father; (4) He is made of the same spirit and likeness as God the Father; (5) He upholds the universe by His express commands; (6) He has purged us of our sins, and; (7) Has sat down at the right hand of the Father.

Paul then quotes seven scriptures to show Jesus was superior to the angels, which Judaism had highly exalted and some even worshiped them (see Col. 2:18). He says, "For to which of the angels did He ever say: 'You are my son, today I have begotten you'? And again: 'I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son'? But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says: 'Let all the angels of God worship him.' And of the angels He says: 'Who makes his angels, spirits and his ministers, a flame of fire.' But to the Son He says: 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness, more than your companions.' And: 'You, Lord, in the beginning, laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak you will fold them up, and they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will not fail.' But to which of the angels has He ever said: 'Sit at my right hand, till I make your enemies your footstool'? Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?" (Heb. 1:5-14).

So here is one of the main purposes for the creation of angels: to serve those human beings who will one day inherit salvation. What a great privilege it will be to have angels able to serve us! This is why Paul now mentions the incredible potential humans have through Jesus Christ.

He says, "Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will? For He has not put *the world to come*, of which we speak, in subjection to angels. But one testified in a certain place, saying: 'What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you take care of him? You have made him a little lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, and set him over the works of your hands. You have put all things in subjection 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 do not yet see all things put under him" (Heb. 2:1-8).

So he warns these Hebrew Christians they must not deny Jesus Christ, for if the first generation of Israelites did not enter the Promised Land because of unbelief, how much worse is their fate if they neglect through unbelief a much greater salvation? It means not entering *the kingdom of God*! If they go back to Judaism, their incredible human potential will be lost and there are no second chances. He reminds them of what David said about man being so insignificant, yet at the same time, so honored by God. But this potential can only be achieved through accepting Christ.

He stresses, "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone. For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings" (Heb. 2:9-10).

It is only by what Jesus has done that we can inherit this salvation. As Peter mentioned in Acts 4:10-12, "...by the name of Jesus Christ...is there salvation...for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Tragically, the Jewish leaders had rejected this truth then--and up to the present time!

Paul continues about Christ, "For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: 'I will declare your name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to you.' And again: 'I will put my trust in him.' And again: 'Here am I and the children whom God has given me'" (Heb. 2:11-13).

He is emphasizing the amazing privilege of being called "brothers and sisters" by Jesus Christ! They are becoming an integral part of the family of God, and backs it with three scriptures. He uses the analogy of being our Elder Brother and we as being his younger siblings. As *The Contemporary English Version* puts it, "Jesus and the people He makes holy all belong to *the same family*. That is why He isn't ashamed to call them His brothers and sisters." We again see this "mystery of the fellowship (*koinonia*)" at play, showing God the Father and Jesus want to share *all things* with us!

Paul goes on to say, "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For indeed He does not give aid to angels, but He does give aid to the seed of Abraham" (Heb. 2:14-16).

Here is described all that Jesus Christ did for us. He put on flesh and blood and became a man, lived on the earth, and being mortal, He could then *die* for our sins and annul the power Satan had over us, having satisfied the death penalty of sin by becoming our substitute. People feared death because there was not much hope until Christ came and released us from that hopelessness.

Expositor's brings out, "The defeat of the devil means the setting free of those he had held sway over, those who had been gripped by fear of death. Fear is an inhibiting and enslaving thing; and when

people are gripped by the ultimate fear--the fear of death--they are in cruel bondage.

"In the first century this was very real. The philosophers urged people to be calm in the face of death, and some of them managed to do so. But to most people this brought no relief. Fear was widespread, as the hopeless tone of the inscriptions on tombs clearly illustrates. But one of the many wonderful things about the Christian gospel is that it delivers men and women from this fear. They are saved with a sure hope of life eternal, a life whose best lies beyond the grave."

Paul goes on to say, "Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted" (Heb. 2:17-18).

So in Hebrews, a new concept is brought out -- that of Jesus Christ as a merciful and faithful High Priest. So not only is He symbolically the sacrificial Lamb, but also the High Priest who presents this sacrifice to God. Having both roles, He satisfies the payment for sin, and intercedes for us by removing the wrath due to our sins.

As *Expositor's* mentions, "When people sin, they arouse the wrath of God (Rom 1:18); they become enemies of God (Rom 5:10). One aspect of salvation deals with this wrath, and it is to this the author is directing attention at this point. Christ saves us in a way that takes account of the divine wrath against every evil thing."

Also shown here is the fact that His sufferings were real and He was "tempted" just as we are.

Expositor's explains, "Throughout his earthly life Jesus suffered. Being what He is, temptation must have been far more distasteful for Him than it is for us. The Greek verb *peirastheis* ('tempted') sometimes means 'tested,' and here it might conceivably apply to the sufferings simply as trials to be endured. But the verb is more often used in the sense of 'tempt.' The author is saying that Jesus can help the tempted because he has perfect sympathy with them. He too has been tempted and knows what temptation is. The words 'he is able' are important and mean more than 'he helps.' Only he who suffers can help in this way. Jesus went all

the way for us. He was not only ready to suffer, but He actually did suffer."

In chapter 3 (where the NKJ is confusing and we will use the CEV for clarity) we come to the comparison between Jesus and Moses, showing Jesus is far superior: "My friends, God has chosen you to be his holy people. So think about Jesus, the one we call our apostle and high priest! Jesus was faithful to God, who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in serving all of God's people. But Jesus deserves more honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house deserves more honor than the house. Of course, every house is built by someone, and God is really the one who built everything. Moses was a faithful servant and told God's people what would be said in the future. But Christ is the Son in charge of God's people. And we are those people, if we keep on being brave and don't lose hope" (Heb. 3:1-6).

Expositor's comments, "Now the author turns his attention to Moses, regarded by the Jews as the greatest of men. They could even think of him as greater than angels. Perhaps then he was superior to Jesus? The writer does nothing to belittle Moses. Nor does he criticize him. He accepts Moses' greatness but shows that as great as he was, Jesus was greater by far."

The "house" being referred to here is "the household of God" and not a physical building. The comparison is between the servant of that family and of the Father's Son, who inherits everything and has every honor. Jesus created this "family," or people of God, of which Moses was a faithful servant. So Christ's stature and teachings are far superior and therefore, Jewish Christians should not go back to Judaism but go forward to Christ.

As *Expositor's* stresses, "Christ has an innate superiority. He is the Son and as such is 'over' the household...But he is not thinking of the Jews as a race nor of a group of historical figures. He is thinking of *the people of God*. In O.T. days, this had been the people Israel. But Israel had rejected the Son of God when he came, and now the people of God is *the Church*. Perseverance is one of the marks of being a Christian. Without it we are not Christ's." This is a vital lesson for us to learn.

So, as we have seen, Hebrews is a marvelous epistle. Yet, there is so much more that awaits us!