

## Sermon Preparation Notes - Hebrews Chapter 1

### The structure of the chapter:

- (vv1-2) The discontinuity and continuity of the new revelation in Christ
  - the same God is speaking but in new and better way.
- (vv2-3) Christ is a better agent of revelation
  - a higher position, a greater power, a greater glory, a closer relation to the Father, a deeper interaction in the creation, he has accomplished a greater feat, he has received a greater reward.
- (vv3-14) Scriptural proofs of Christ's supremacy to angels

### General Comments:

Hebrews starts with a bang. Within two verses we are into some of the most mystical theology in the Bible - Jesus is the heir who will inherit all things, Jesus is the agent through whom the universe was brought into existence, Jesus is the one who consciously and continually holds all of creation in existence moment by moment!

Before we get into that deep mystical theology we first have to get through a verse that summarises the spiritual history of God's dealing with men.

In Eden God related to man face to face (Gen. 3:8).

Sin broke that relationship and God's dealing with men became;

- indirect - through patriarchs / judges / prophets / priests,
- mediated - God mostly speaks through phenomena, dreams, visions, events, angels etc.
- intermittent - God speaks from time to time, no longer is there continual fellowship,
- fragmentary - all revelation was partial, to be added to, to be completed.

The author's point is that an incredible change has taken place in the coming of Jesus. God no longer relates to mankind in the same way. He makes clear to his Jewish readers / hearers, that the way that their forefathers and the O.T. prophets related to God was radically different from the way that they can now relate to God.

Jesus is God's first step in repairing the broken Eden fellowship;

- Jesus deals with sin and repairs the relationship,
- this allows the sending of the Spirit and the birth of the Church / the coming of the Kingdom,
- the work of the Spirit in the Church / Kingdom in turn opens the way for the consummation of the ages,
- in this final consummation face to face fellowship between man and his God is re-established in Heaven (Rev 22:3).

### Verse by Verse Analysis:

v1 - God speaks - This implies that God views man as capable of fellowship and that God values man in desiring fellowship with him.

v1-2 - The contrast is made between the agents of God's speaking - the prophets and the Son. The fact that God spoke through many different prophets and at many different times implies two things. That the O.T. revelation through the prophets was;

- inadequate (needing to be repeated, developed),
- fragmentary and partial in nature (constantly being added to),

This is in stark contrast to the revelation which comes to us through the Son. His revelation is both final and complete.

- Whilst the prophets and the Son are contrasted the continuity of their revelation is also affirmed. It is the same God speaking.

- The prophets are men and women who were empowered by God to hear and to see a deeper, truer reality which stands behind the surface of normal perception. This ability to perceive the spiritual realities, or deeper level of truth behind the surface, was - temporary (the Spirit of God rest permanently on any O.T. prophet) and also partial (they saw only a small part of the picture).

- Jesus therefore excels the O.T. agents of revelation by his permanent access to the Spirit of God and his complete knowledge of the mind of God.

v2-3 - How do we know that Jesus has this deeper knowledge? Because Jesus was God's agent in creating all of reality and because the history of the cosmos will be culminated in the Father's establishment of Jesus as its ruler. If Jesus made it, and if Jesus is destined to rule it, who can claim a better understanding of it?

- Jesus' constant involvement with creation is established - he created it (involvement in its beginning), he sustains it moment by moment in existence (involvement in its present and carrying it forwards towards its goal), he will be established as its ruler and Lord (involvement in its end).

- Jesus is the imprint of the Father - the word used refers to the die which is pressed into metal to strike a coin, or the seal which forms an imprint in wax.

- Jesus sustains (bears or carries) all things. The idea is of a dynamic and purposeful carrying through to a final goal.

- Jesus has performed a better sacrifice than that of the Old Covenant. He has made purification for sins for all mankind in a once and for all event, in contrast to the repeated sacrifices of the O.T. priesthood. Christ's purification is internal (a matter of conscience) rather than external (a matter of religious purity).

- Jesus' resurrection after his achievement of our purification is stated as a glorification event. He has been exalted and enthroned in heaven. Sitting is the posture of rest (his work is completed) by contrast the posture of a priest which was standing. The right hand is also the position of honour.

*[discussion - It is striking to think that only 30 to 40 years after Jesus was executed in the most shameful way, we now see his followers stating some radical claims about him. They claim he was pre-existent with the Father before time began. That he was intimately involved in the creation of the universe. That he sustaining creation in existence moment by moment carrying it through to its final goal. That he will be established as Lord of the whole universe at the end of time!*

*Similarly the "Christ Hymn" of Philippians 2:6-11 also contains a highly advanced understanding of the divinity of Christ - and this was written only 20 years after Christ's ascension.*

*How did Christians arrive so quickly at this understanding of the man they first knew as the carpenter from Nazareth?*

*The answer can only be through the following -*

*- Reflecting upon Jesus' life and ministry, only his being divine made sense of it all.*

*- The felt impact of the resurrection event.*

*- Through the experience of the powerful and life-giving Spirit of Jesus at work in his Church.*

*Jesus' life proclaimed his divinity. Jesus resurrection proclaimed his divinity. Jesus' continued presence and activity amongst them through the work of his Spirit proclaimed his divinity.*

*They also came to understand Jesus' resurrection as a 'new creation'. In being exalted to glory with the Father Jesus Christ is shown to share in the life of the godhead.*

*In coming to understand Christ's divinity they also came to realise that obviously Christ must also have been present in the creation event. Similarly he will also be involved in the culmination of that creation.]*

v4 - Jesus has become much greater than the angels. Why 'become'? Because Jesus voluntarily gave up his power and glory in the incarnation and only after his resurrection and glorification has he been re-instated by God in his position of supremacy and honour.

*[discussion - Why nearly two whole chapters focussed entirely upon proving the supremacy of Jesus to the angelic beings?*

*Firstly, Jesus' nature has been stressed from above in his intimate relation to the Father, now it is natural that the author would then stress his dignity and power from below in his superiority to the most glorious agents in God's creation - angels.*

*Secondly, the Jewish people were, particularly at this time in history, fascinated by angels and their activity in God's universe. Contemporary Jewish literature contains speculation about the creation of the angels, their rôle in the heavenly court, their function as guardians of the nations (especially Michael as the angel of Israel), their capacity to visit men and women with blessing or punishment.*

*We see in the N.T. a similar focus on angels as intimately involved in God's creation. This is especially the case in the book of Revelation, where angels are shown as guardians of, or responsible for, individual churches (1:20; 2:1), bear announcements of God's decrees (8:4) and do battle with the devil on behalf of the saints (12:7-9; 20:1).*

*For us as 21st century westerners we have a hard time imagining the existence of angels because in our worldview they have no job to do. Scientific rationalism explains our world. Technology, medicine and science enable man to control and manipulate our world (at least most of the time) so why would we need angels?*

*In all other ages of mankind spiritual beings have been believed to exist and to have a continual influence on the life of man - health / illness, good weather / natural disasters, successful harvests / crop failures, etc. All events in life were believed to be essentially spiritual in nature.*

*For us today, with our scientific knowledge of the mechanisms which produce these events, the challenge is to see that behind these mechanisms there are still spiritual realities at work.*

*The Bible presents a completely a view of the world in which the physical and spiritual exist side by side, and the membrane that separates them is very thin. Moreover, in the biblical view it is the spiritual world that is the more real and it is the physical world that is the shadow reality.]*

v5-14 - Scriptural proofs that Jesus is superior to the angels.

- The majority of the texts cited are psalms that are read messianically. In this usage if scripture its original meaning and context are largely ignored because all scripture is seen as having a greater and fuller significance beyond its original intention. All scripture points towards the Messiah.

v5-6 - Psalm 2:7 and 2 Sam 7:14 are cited, both passages refer to a son who is also a king. Both are connected to the figure of David. Both are in the form of royal pronouncements. Both texts are cited elsewhere in scripture as being messianic.

v7-12 - Psalm 104:4, 45:6-7, 102:26-28 are cited.

Psalm 103 is a hymn to the creator extolling the might and majesty of God.

Psalm 44 is from a davidic dynasty royal wedding. The King in his enthronement - selected and made king by the will of God - stood as God's servant in representing the nation over which he ruled and he also represented God to the people. He was thus, in certain contexts, referred to as 'god' himself.

Thus someone who is thoroughly human, can also because of his enthronement, be seen to participate in the divine activity of God and thus be called god.

This is a brilliant image to use to point towards the reality of the incarnation of Christ. Christ is also fully human and yet fully God. This is one of only 7 direct references in the N.T. to the divinity of Christ.

Thus scripture itself becomes the grounding of the paradox of the incarnation - man and God, two natures in one person.

Note that the rule of the King is expressed in terms of its moral qualities - love of righteousness, hatred of wickedness. It is precisely the king's possession of such moral qualities that have led to his being enthroned.

Psalm 101 contrasts the mortal realm and the immortal God. God's greatness is expressed as a function of his standing outside of time. Unlike his creation, God is unravaged and untouched by the passing of time. This citation serves to refer back to the previous statement about Christ's involvement in the creation event and to refer forward to his presence at creation's culmination.

This psalm also anticipates the majestic christological declaration of 13:8 - Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

v13-14 - Psalm 110:1 is cited. A reference back to the claim in v3 about Christ's exaltation. The relative position of Christ and the angels is again highlighted. No angel has been exalted to God's right hand. The image is further pressed by showing God the Father honouring the Son by taking on the rôle of a servant and placing a footstool for him. If the Father serves the Son in this way, how much greater is the Son than the angels who are servants of the Father.

v14 - That angels are not divine has already been established (v5-6). That angels are ministers and spirits has also been established (v7). What is new in this verse is the addition that angels are sent out for service to those who are going to inherit salvation. As Christ will inherit all things, so those linked to him will also inherit something - their salvation. Note that by this step the relative status of the angels is further diminished. Now they are not only servants of God but servants of the saved.

*[discussion - in the 81's there was a craze of 'sending angels'. Certain US churches developed a theology from this verse whereby the saved can command the angels to go and do our bidding. Neither this verse, nor any other verse in scripture validates this practice. Whilst angels are 'sent to serve those who are being saved', they are God's*

*servants, not ours. It is God who commands them not us. Our rôle is simply to pray asking for God to intervene in situations. How God intervenes and what agents he uses in his intervention are his decision and his alone.*

*This said we should however be certain of the reality of the presence of angels in our midst, at work in our churches, active in our world.]*