

Hebrews 1

This book is unashamedly about Jesus the Messiah, and the writer starts as he means to continue! A friend said to us very recently that she would sum up the message of **Hebrews** in just three words: “Jesus is better!” That’s a great start, and we shall discover even more as we read through and study together . . .

Verses 1-2. A striking difference in the way God is now communicating with us! Prophets brought the words of God in times past. Now God speaks in the Son. Reminds me of **John 1:1-3 & 14**. The writer refers to ‘God’ and not ‘the Father’, but the Father-Son relationship is clearly highlighted here.

‘*Appointed heir of all things*’. ‘Appointed’ means ‘laid down’, ‘set in place’. It’s settled; the Son **is** the heir of all things¹.

‘*Through whom also he made the world*’ reminds me of **John 1** again, and also of **Revelation 3:14** and **Colossians 1:15-20**. The writer is building a clear picture of who Jesus really is, in the timeframe of eternity. This is not ‘gentle Jesus, meek and mild’ !

Verse 3a. . . . and there’s more! The Son is the radiance (literally, the ‘flashing out’) of the Father’s glory – he’s the best way for us to see the glory of God – and exactly represents his nature. The word translated ‘representation’ is *charaktēr*, meaning an engraving, a firm image. Perhaps the English word ‘characteristic’ comes close to the meaning. And ‘nature’ goes much deeper than appearance; it speaks of the deep, underlying and foundational essence of who God really is.

Not surprising, then, that the Son is the one who upholds (literally ‘carries’) all things (literally ‘the all’) by the word of his power. This ‘word’ is not *logos*, the established principle and declaration of God (as in **John 1** again) but *rhema*, the ‘spoken-in-the-moment’ word. And ‘power’ (*dunamis*) – though it is often used in connection with miracles in the NT – comes from a word that means ‘the ability to do’.

The Son was not only intimately involved with the creation of the world, it is his current, spoken ‘word’ which has the ability to (and does) ‘carry’ – maintain and keep running – all things! Wow!²

Verse 3b-4. It is this same majestic being who went through the utter degradation of dying a shameful, criminal’s death and “*made purification of sins*” and only then “*sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having*

¹ And we are heirs together with him, as we can see in other places: **Romans 4:13-16, Romans 8:15-25, Galatians 3:23-4:7, Titus 3:5-7, James 2:5**. More to come in **Hebrews 6:17 & 11:7**.

² See also **Colossians 1:17**. “. . . in him all things stand together”

become as much better than the angels, as he has inherited a more excellent name than they.” Why does the writer say ‘become’? Surely, as he has already written, Jesus was **already** much better than the angels! So why ‘become’?? The hymn writer Caroline Maria Noel (1817-1877) seems to have just about put her finger on it in her hymn *At the Name of Jesus*. Here are just a few lines:

Humbled for a season,
to receive a name
from the lips of sinners
unto whom he came;
Faithfully he bore it
spotless to the last,
brought it back victorious
when from death he passed.

Bore it up triumphant
with its human light,
through all ranks of creatures
to the central height,
to the throne of Godhead,
to the Father’s breast,
filled it with the glory
of that perfect rest.

Yes, from eternity past the eternal Son has always had unspeakable glory and majesty, as we have already seen in the opening verses of this book. But then he became a man, and it was as a man that he **became** much better than the angels, in the process briefly outlined in the words of that hymn, having become the heir of a more excellent name than the angels have.

We shall explore more about that in the next chapter – and beyond! In fact, you could almost say that the whole book of **Hebrews** is primarily concerned with exploring the name and the inheritance of Jesus the Messiah – and our inheritance in him!

Meanwhile, in the rest of this chapter, the writer digs into OT prophecy to show the uniqueness of the Son. The name ‘Jesus’ does not appear until **Hebrews 2** and the title ‘Christ’ or ‘Messiah’ makes its first appearance in **Hebrews 3**. The writer is setting the scene in the timeframe of **eternity past**, so that both his Jewish and Gentile readers can catch a glimpse of the eternal purposes of God and also begin to see how the message of Jesus the Messiah fits into the way that the LORD spoke to, and worked with, his chosen people over **centuries past**. The fulfilment of his purposes and the inheritance of the people of God – theirs and ours!

Verse 5 quotes two verses and introduces another line of understanding, comparing the Son with the angels (= messengers) of God:

Psalm 2:7. Paul quotes from this same verse when he speaks in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch (**Acts 13:14-41** and specifically **v.33**), and the writer again in **Hebrews 5:5**. There are more obvious references to the Messiah in this psalm: The word 'Anointed' in **v.2** is the Hebrew word *mâshiyâch* (= 'Messiah'); **v.8** extends the promise of **v.7**; and **v.9** is quoted three times in **Revelation**, e.g. **2:26-27**, **12:5**, **19:15**, all in direct relation to the coming rule of the Son. In **2:26-27**, the Son promises a share in that rule to those in the Church who are 'overcomers'.

2 Samuel 7:14. An early promise of the coming descendant of King David. Read the whole passage, **7:8-17**, especially **v. 12 & 13**. David may have thought that this promise related to Solomon, but there are promises here which extend far beyond the LORD's dealings with him!

No, there is no record of the LORD ever making promises like this to any angels!

Verse 6 continues the theme: Angels – all of them – are directed to worship the Son. The word in Greek here means to kiss towards or do obeisance; in the quoted **Psalm 97:7**, the Hebrew word means exactly the same. If we look this verse up in our own Bibles, we shall find reference to 'gods', which is a translation of the Hebrew *ĕlôhîym*, a plural word which is sometimes used for God himself and sometimes for angels or other spiritual beings. In the Septuagint (Greek translation of the OT) the word is *angeloi* – angels.

Verse 7 – more comparisons with angels, quoting from **Psalm 104:4**. The word translated 'messenger' here is more often translated 'angel' in the OT, and also as 'ambassador' or 'envoy'. Someone entrusted with a message or a special commission, but not a Son!

In **verses 8 & 9**, a direct reference to the Son being God, and looking back to **Psalm 45:6-7**, we find the same double references: "*Your throne, O God . . .*" and "*Therefore God, your God . . .*" This psalm was written to celebrate the marriage of a king: maybe initially the marriage of a king of Israel but also, clearly, a foretaste of the 'marriage of the Lamb' (**Revelation 19:7-9**). See also a reference to God's kingdom being everlasting (literally, 'of all ages') in **Psalm 145:8-13**.

Reference here to the Son being **anointed**. In the Hebrew of the psalm, the word is *mâshach*, closely related to *mâshiyâch* (= 'Messiah'), and Jesus quoted **Isaiah 61:1** about himself, using the same word. See **Luke 4:16-30**. Significant that he made this claim in his own 'home synagogue'! See the forcefulness of reaction from his fellow-townspeople, who (of course) reckoned he was Joseph's son. By using the word 'anointed', he was making an early claim to be the Messiah. The word for 'anoint' in Greek is *chrîo*, from which comes the word *christos*, the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *mâshiyâch*.

Verses 10-12 are direct quotes from ***Psalm 102:25-27***, again in the Septuagint version and so slightly different from what we can see in our own OT translations, which were made mostly from Hebrew manuscripts.¹ This psalm is addressed directly to the LORD, so the writer here is taking words addressed to God himself and applying them to the Son. Reference again to the Son's work in creation links back to **v.2**. And the truth of **v.12** is repeated in ***Hebrews 13:8***!

Verse 13 quotes ***Psalm 110:1***, a verse which the Lord Jesus quoted to the Pharisees in ***Matthew 23:41-46***. Even they had to agree that the 'Son of David' (one of their names for the expected Messiah) would in fact be David's Lord, not his subservient son!

Verse 14 sums it up: Angels are servants to the heirs of salvation. Did the readers of this letter have a bit of a fixation about angels? The writer is evidently determined to help them to see that the Son is unique and not just another 'ordinary' messenger of God. There are references to angels in later chapters, so it is just possible that he is also 'preparing the ground' for what he is going to write a little later.

Have you noticed how all but one of these promises are quoted from the Psalms – and the 'odd one out' is a promise made directly to King David? Some of these psalms were written by David (whose kingdom was in some ways a foretaste of the coming Kingdom of God), and were recognised at the time as being Messianic – looking forward to the coming Anointed One.

God had certainly spoken to the Jewish ancestors through the prophets 'in many portions and in many ways' (**v.1**), and there are many other OT prophecies looking forward to the coming Messiah, but David and the other psalmists usually concentrated on praise to the LORD and personal response to him, so it seems very appropriate that the writer has called on them to be the ones to highlight the exalted position of the eternal Son of God in this chapter.

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¹ Until the 'Dead Sea Scrolls' were discovered between 1947 and 1956, the Greek Septuagint was regarded by many scholars as being more reliable than some old Hebrew documents. The scrolls are considered to be the second-oldest surviving manuscripts of the Hebrew Bible.