



Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for June 1, 2008
Released on May 28, 2008

"Christ as God's Son"

Printed Text: Hebrews 1:1-12

Background Scripture: Hebrews 1

Devotional Reading: Proverbs 8:22-31

Hebrews 1:1-12

1 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets.

2 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;

3 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;

4 Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

5 For 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?

6 And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.

7 And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.

8 But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.

9 Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

10 And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands.

11 They shall perish; but thou remainest: and they all shall wax old as doth a garment;

12 And as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.

Today's Aim

Facts: to examine selected verses from Hebrews 1 that reveal Christ as the Son of God.

Principle: to reveal attributes of the Son of God.

Application: to help students know and more fully appreciate the character of God's Son, our Savior.

Introduction

Some folks have an intense fascination with angels. Print and electronic media are filled with stories of angelic visitations. Talk of angels is welcomed, because with angels people can have religious experiences without Jesus Christ.

The problem is that biblical teachings about angels get mixed in with unbiblical ideas. Angel stories are not necessarily bad; angels do exist and do God's bidding. But angels from God never distract from Him. We must be careful never to leave the master for the servant.

Background Scripture

The book of Hebrews is a bit unusual. It ends with greetings like an epistle (Hebrews 13:20–25), yet the beginning is unlike a normal letter (contrast the opening verses of Hebrews with those of Colossians, etc.). Even so, the author refers to this work as "a letter" in Hebrews 13:22.

Hebrews 1:1–4 is the introduction that contains the starting threads of the key themes of the book. These themes are woven into the fabric of the entire work. Hebrews 1:4, the last verse of this introduction, leads into the author's first point, which actually extends through 2:4.

The original readers of the book of Hebrews were Jewish believers who had been undergoing some persecution (Hebrews 10:32–34). They were tempted to give up true Christianity for something false (10:35–39). Jews of the first century had a pervasive fascination with angels. We see evidence of this in some of the nonbiblical writings that come into being between the Old and New Testaments (called the intertestamental writings).

We can almost hear the original readers' questions that prompt our author to write chapter 1: "We know about angels; is Jesus as strong as they? He died; is he powerful enough to save?" The author of Hebrews has clear answers.

God's Communication (Hebrews 1:1, 2a)

1. How did God reveal Himself before Christ came to earth? (Hebrews 1:1)

Two keywords in verse one that we should pay attention to are "sundry" and "divers." The phrase "at sundry times" literally means "in the manner of many parts."

The first instruments God used to reveal Himself were the prophets. These were men He anointed to give His message to the ancestors of these Jewish readers. The message came at various times and by varied means. It was given to them in fragments, adding pieces of revelation little by little. The Old Testament thus took shape progressively, with God revealing to each generation all that He deemed necessary for them.

He also taught Israel through miraculous victories and horrible defeats. He used history, law, parable, prophecy, poetry, and song to convey His message.

2. How did God's revelation in His son differ from all preceding revelation? (v. 2a)

This verse makes two contrasts with verse 1. The first is between "in time past" of verse 1 and *in these last days* here. The last days began with the first coming of Christ. We have been living in the last days for two millennia (1 John 2:18).

The second contrast is between "by the prophets" of verse 1 and *by his Son* here. More specifically, this contrast is between the prophets as mere human mouthpieces for God and one who has the quality of divine sonship. When God speaks through His Son, He cannot be more direct! To see Jesus is to see the Father (John 14:9). People who long for more revelation from God need simply to look to the Son. There is no greater nor clearer revelation of God.

God's Son (Hebrews 1:2b-4)

3. In what sense did Jesus Christ create the world? (v. 2b)

First, God appointed the Son as *heir of all things* (compare Matthew 21:38). As God's heir, the Son has divine authority and ownership, far more than any created being. *All things* means everything that exists. In Matthew 28:18, Jesus made known that at that time He had this authority over all.

Second, God created *the worlds* by means of the Son. The Greek word translated as *worlds* usually refers to time, but it is used here to refer to all that goes on or exists in time. Hence, it relates to the universe. The Son not only owns the universe, He was also involved in creating it (John 1:3; Colossians 1:16).

4. How did the writer of Hebrews describe the relationship between Jesus and His Father? (v. 3a)

God's Son, Jesus is "the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person" (Heb. 1:3). These expressions of Christ's relation to His Father clearly teach His deity. "Brightness" refers to radiance that emanates from a source of light. As the Shekinah reflected God's glory on earth in Old Testament days, so did Jesus during His sojourn on earth (John 1:18; 12:44-46; 14:9).

The word translated "express image" in Hebrews 1:3 is the term from which our word "character" comes. It was commonly used of the stamp or impression made on coins or seals. As the impression was the exact image on the die, so Christ is the exact image of God's "person," or substance. God's essence is visible in Christ. All that the Father is, He is also (cf. Col. 1:15).

5. What is Jesus' present relationship to the universe? (v. 3b)

Jesus Christ is now "upholding all things by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3). Not only did He create all things; He also maintains them continually! The verb translated "upholding" means "bearing" or "carrying." He carries along to their intended goal everything He has created, whether animate or inanimate. Paul expressed the same truth: "by him all things consist (hold together)" (Col. 1:17).

Christ accomplishes this "by the word of his power" (Heb. 1:3). Just as it took powerful divine utterances to bring the world into being (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11), so it requires the enabling word of Christ to keep it operating smoothly. It is sobering and humbling to realize that we could not even draw our next breath apart from His decree. This is the superior nature of the One whom God sent.

6. What is significant about Jesus being seated at God's right hand? (v. 3c)

Jesus is our great high priest. He intercedes for us whenever we fall into sin. When Jesus Christ paid our sin debt in full, he was elevated and sat on the right hand of God. Jesus was given this high position only after "he had by himself purged our sins." A clearer translation would be "having made purification of our sins." It speaks of an action performed only once.

This purification has come about only through the work of the great High Priest, who offered His own blood as a sacrifice to God (cf. Heb. 9:12-14, 25-28). And because this sacrifice was perfect and final, He then "sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (1:3). The tense of "sat down" implies completed action at a point in time; so it may read "took His seat." Unlike earlier priests, who always stood because of unfinished work, Jesus sat down because His was completed.

Seated at the right hand of the divine Majesty, Jesus occupies the most exalted position in the universe. The term "majesty" is a synonym for God Himself, and the right hand signifies the place of honor. Having completed His redemptive work, Jesus returned to the position He occupied before (cf. Luke 22:69; John 1:18; Phil. 2:9).

7. How does (or how should) knowing that your sins have been purged by Christ affect your daily life?

Some believers want the benefits of Christianity without the responsibilities. They want the forgiveness of sins but do not want to accept the lordship of Christ. But it is important that we see that the power that cleanses our sins is the same power available to direct our lives. It is through the power of the Lord that Christians are able to face the difficulties and obstacles of daily living victoriously.

Second Corinthians 12:9 tells us that this power demonstrates itself in our weakness. The power that created the world, the power that broke the shackles of death, the power that cleanses our sin is the power we have for living.

The Son's Superiority (Heb. 1:5-7)

8. Who is the Son contrasted with in this chapter of Hebrews? (vs. 4-7)

In all these ways the Son is as superior to the *angels* as His *name* is to theirs. What names? *Son* versus *angel*. Whereas an angel is a created messenger, the Son is the divine, uncreated creator. Not only does He possess the name (status) of "Son" (v. 5). He also receives worship from the angels (v. 6). Moreover, even though angels are as impressive in their work as wind and fire, they are nevertheless only "his ministers" (v. 7).

Many people put so much emphasis on angels. There are some that will go as far as to worship angels, but we must remember that angels are just God's servants. They are not to be worshipped; only the Creator is worthy of worship.

The Son's Position (Heb. 1:8-12)

9. What is the nature of the kingdom Christ rules? (v. 8)

Verse 8 tells us that Christ's kingdom is eternal and righteous (cf. Psa. 45:6; Isa. 9:6-7; 11:1-5). Why is Christ's kingdom a righteous one? It is because He Himself is righteous. He has "loved righteousness, and hated iniquity" (Heb. 1:9). He has proved Himself to be free from all taint corruption or even impure motive. "Loved" and "hated" indicate the intensity of His commitment.

Because of this, God has anointed Him with the oil of gladness. This anointing refers figuratively to Jesus' exaltation after His earthly sojourn. "The joy that was set before him" (Heb. 12:2) is likened to the "oil of gladness" (1:9) at a festive occasion. His joyous exaltation surpasses that of His "fellows," or companions.

10. Who are these "fellows," or companions who share in Christ's joy? (v. 9)

Most likely they are the sons God is bringing into glory (Heb. 2:10) and whom Christ is not ashamed to call "brethren" (v. 11). In other words, those who have accepted Him as Lord and Savior are the ones who will be His companions. He, the eternal and righteous King, has so thoroughly identified Himself with us that He suffered the same temptations as we (vs. 14-18). And now He shares His regal joy with us.

11. How is Christ contrasted with the universe He created? (vs. 10-12)

The writer continued his contrast between the creation and its Creator, The earth and the heavens will perish, but He will remain. Many, even from ancient times, have supposed that the universe is eternal. And, indeed, there is much in the solidity of the mountains and the repetitious round of nature to suggest that this is the case (Ecc 1:4-7). But Scripture declares that it will eventually give way to a new order (2 Pet. 3:7, 10).

Hebrews 1:12 describes this end as the folding up of a "vesture." Whereas "garment" (v. 11) can refer to any clothing, "vesture" refers to an outer wrap or

mantle. When its usefulness ends, the present universe will be folded up. But this does not mean that all physical reality will be annihilated; it will simply be "changed" (v. 12). This word, which can also be translated "exchanged," implies that something different will follow, as when one season follows another.

So, under divine direction, the present order will pass away at the end of the millennium. A new heaven and earth will take its place (2 Pet. 3:12-13; Rev. 21:1).

"Thy years shall not fail" (Heb. 1:12) is a poetic expression that means Christ will never die. Every created being will pass away, but He remains. This is why He could say, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matt. 24:35). Because He is eternal, He is uniquely fitted to be God's final revelation to us. We would do well to pay attention!

12. Why is it important that we see Christ as one who never grows old?

When we think of someone growing old, we often think of the weaknesses that come with old age. There is the loss of sight and hearing, the loss of energy, and sometimes the loss of creativity. But none of that applies to Jesus. He always hears our prayers. He continues to possess that awe-inspiring power that strengthens and sustains us daily.

The Lord God will ever remain the same. All else will change, but His years will not fail. What should this fact lead us to do?

Conclusion

In the 2002 movie Spiderman, there is a scene with a girl trapped inside a burning building. The flames are so intense that the police and firefighters are unable to save her. Spiderman, wanted by the police for being a suspected criminal, arrives.

At the scene, Spiderman is arrested. He offers to go get the girl. The policeman, though obligated to hold him, suddenly lets him go. Why? Because only Spiderman is able to help. They need the amazing Spiderman to do what they could not. But that's fiction, and there is no Spiderman. Yet humans do indeed live in a burning building: death. This is because of sin. We need someone who can rescue us because we cannot overcome or escape on our own. Whom will we trust to do this? A guardian angel? The author of Hebrews has a better answer: trust Jesus! He is stronger than any angel (or any other created being).

Our superhero is the very Son of God. He alone is able to save. He is not a comic book character. He is real.

Prayer

Perfect Father, when fears and doubts about things worldly and unworldly assail us, help us to remember Your Son. He is more than enough! This has always been and always shall be. In Jesus' name, amen.

Thought to Remember

When we listen to Jesus, we listen to God.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

Next week we study a passage that reveals Jesus as our supreme intercessor after the order of Melchizedec. Read Hebrews 7:1-28.

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