

Christ is Superior to the Prophets

Hebrews 1:4

Part Eight

If the world were to look at us this morning they would not see any kings or queens or princes or princesses, or prime ministers, or presidents or vice presidents, or senators, or congressmen, or mayors or even the sons or daughters of any of these people.

And because of this, if the people of the world were to look at us this morning they would from their perspective not see anyone among us of particular importance or significance. But they would be mistaken, for they may not see us as particularly important or significant, but God certainly does.

And this thought brings us back to our study of Hebrews, which was written by an unknown author to a group of Hebrew Christians living in Rome around 67-69 AD in order to strengthen their faith in the midst of a great persecution so that they in the midst of that persecution would not be tempted to turn from Christ back to Judaism.

So how did this author seek to strengthen the faith of these struggling Hebrew Christians by his letter? He sought to strengthen their faith by showing them throughout his letter that Christ was superior to anything that they might have left behind in Judaism, which led us to the question that we are now seeking to answer as we continue our study of this book. And what is that question?

How did the author of the book of Hebrews see Christ as superior?

First of all, the author of the book of Hebrews saw Christ as superior to the Old Testament prophets (Hebrews 1:1-4). So in what way did the author of Hebrews see Christ as superior to these Old Testament prophets?

The author of the book of Hebrews saw Christ as superior to the Old Testament prophets because he believed that Christ, being God's Son, was the culmination of divine revelation (Hebrews 1:1-2a).

In other words, the author of the book of Hebrews saw the Old Testament prophets simply as an opening act of divine revelation sent to prepare the way for the true headliner who was Christ, the only begotten Son of God. We saw this in **Hebrews 1:1** through the first part of **verse 2**.

But the author of Hebrews was not satisfied with simply having made this point. He wanted to drive this point home to his readers even further. So how did the author seek to accomplish this?

The author of Hebrews continued to drive home the magnitude of Christ's superiority to the Old Testament prophets by providing a seven-fold description of Christ (Hebrews 1:2b-4). And where did the author record this seven-fold description? He recorded it for us in **Hebrews 1:2-4**. So now let me quickly review for you those parts of this description that we have already covered.

The author of Hebrews described Christ as God's appointed heir of all things (Hebrews 1:2b). We saw this description in **verse 2**.

The author of Hebrews described God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the One through whom God made the world (Hebrews 1:2c). We also saw this description in **verse 2**.

The author of Hebrews described God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, as the radiance of His Father's glory and the exact representation of His nature (Hebrews 1:3). We saw this description at the beginning of **verse 3**.

The author of Hebrews described God's Son as the One who upholds all things by the word of His power (Heb. 1:3b). We also saw this description in **verse 3**.

The author of Hebrews described Christ as having made purification of sins (Hebrews 1:3). And again we saw this description in **verse 3**.

And lastly, the author of Hebrews described Christ as having sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Hebrews 1:3). And where did we see this description? Again we saw it in **verse 3**.

This is where we were last week. This week we will now be concluding this author's seven-fold description of Christ as we examine **verse 4**.

So what is my hope for this message as we now examine this final concluding part of this author's seven-fold description of Christ? My hope is that as we examine this final concluding part that we might not only better understand this descriptive phrase but also that we might better understand how this descriptive phrase provides us an insight into what lies ahead for us in the future when the world identifies us correctly for who we truly are.

So now with this said, let us now examine this final concluding part of this author's seven-fold description. So, what was this last part? The author of Hebrews described Christ "as having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they" (Hebrews 1:4). This is how the author concluded his seven-fold description of Christ.

Now before we consider the actual words and the meanings of these words within this verse we need to first of all consider the placement of this verse within our overall study. And why would we need to do this? It is quite simple. What have we been talking about? We have been talking about Christ's superiority to Old Testament prophets. Isn't this what we have been talking about? Absolutely!

So why would we attach this verse, which is talking about angels and Christ's superiority to angels, to this seven-fold description of Christ, which was meant by the author of this book to drive home Christ's superiority to Old Testament prophets?

Hebrews 1:4 is a transitional verse which most commentators believe is an example of what is called "trail-head linkage" where such a word as "angels" at the end of one paragraph serves as an introduction to the theme of the next paragraph. And it is for this reason that I, as well as most commentators, have linked **verse 4** with **verses 1-3** rather than **verses 5-8**.

And what is the consequence of this understanding? When we see **verse 4** linked with **verses 1-3** rather than **verses 5-8**; not only does **verse 4** become a part of the author's seven-fold description but also our understanding of **verse 4** must be based on **verses 1-3** rather than on **verses 5-8**.

So with this in mind let us now begin to examine **verse 4** and we will begin with the very first phrase. And what is that phrase? **“Having become as much better than the angels.”**

So based on **Hebrews 1:1-3** what would be the context for understanding this phrase? Based on Hebrews 1:1-3 the phrase, “having become as much better than the angels” must be understood in the context of Christ’s incarnation and subsequent exaltation back to His former glory, when He “sat down at right hand of the Majesty on high.” Why? It is because the incarnation and exaltation of Christ are both alluded to in **Hebrews 1:1-3**, which forms the backdrop, as I have already said, for understanding **verse 4**.

Where do we see the incarnation of Christ in **Hebrews 1:1-3**? We see the incarnation of Christ when the author described Christ as **“having made purification of sins,”** for apart from His incarnation He would never have been able to make purification of sins. We see the exaltation of Christ when the author described Christ as **“having sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,”** for apart from His exaltation He never would have been able to sit down at God’s right hand.

So looking back on **Hebrews 1:1-3** and more specifically on the incarnation and the exaltation of Christ, which were alluded to in the various descriptions of Christ as found in **Hebrews 1:1-3**, how should we understand the phrase **“having become as much better than the angels?”**

When the author spoke of Christ “as having become much better than the angels,” he was emphasizing Christ’s movement from a position of less honor during His incarnation to a place of greater honor in His exaltation.

In other words, there was a time before Christ became a man when He, being in the form of God and enjoying all the trappings of God, was exalted far above all things including the angels. But He willingly, according to the will of Father, gave up all those trappings and that exalted position and became a man so that He, as a man and as God’s sacrificial lamb, might through His death on the cross make purification of sins.

During this period of humiliation Christ was not enjoying the honor that He was due. In fact, He was receiving far less honor than the angels, but this all changed after having fully completed His work of purification. For after He

fully completed His work of purification, Christ **“sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high”** and as such He once again began to receive the honor that He was due from all the heavenly hosts including the angels.

So how should we understand the phrase **“having become as much better than the angels?”** Based on **Hebrews 1:1-3** when the author spoke of Christ as **“having become as much better than the angels,”** he was emphasizing Christ’s movement from a position of less honor during His incarnation to a place of greater honor in His exaltation, which was at the right hand of the Majesty on high or in other words at the right hand of God.

So why was Christ, as a result of His exaltation, entitled to this place of highest honor? Christ, as a result of His exaltation, was entitled to this place of highest honor at God’s right hand, because He had inherited a more excellent name than they. So, what was this **“more excellent name”** that Christ inherited that entitled Him in His exaltation to this place of highest honor?

This name, this “more excellent name,” could hardly be a proper name, such as “Jesus” as though this name per se was a more excellent name than Gabriel or Michael, or all the other angels whose names are totally unknown to us. So for me this position is certainly not very compelling.

So if it is not a proper name that is being referred, then what is the name that is being referred to when this author references this “more excellent name?” This has been a difficult question for me to answer for there are a number of good answers to this question. So, what are some of these good answers?

One of these good answers would be that Christ’s **“more excellent name”** is a reference to Christ Himself and who He is, in terms of His nature and essence. This answer is supported by the way the Jews themselves during this period of time might have used this term.

So, what is another good answer? Another good answer would be that Christ’s **“more excellent name”** is a reference to the name “Lord.” This answer is supported by Paul’s words in **Philippians 2:9-11**. So is this also a good answer? Yes! It is also a good answer.

But even though both of these answers that I just shared with you are good answers, the answer that I believe is the best answer is that based on the immediate context, the “more excellent name” that entitled Christ after His incarnation to return to His former place of honor at the right hand of God was the name “Son” (Hebrews 1:2, 5-14).

So was the “name” or title “Son” prominent in the immediate context? Yes! We see that name or title introduced for Christ in **verse 2** and then we see that same name or title emphasized further for Christ in **verse 5** and continuing to be re-emphasized through **verse 14**.

So based on the immediate context, what is this **“more excellent name”** that Christ inherited that had entitled Christ after His incarnation and after He had made purification of sins to return to His former place of honor at the right hand of God?

Based on the immediate context, the **“more excellent name”** that entitled Christ, after His incarnation and after He had made **“purification of sins,”** to return to His former place of honor at the right hand of God was the name **“Son.”**

And doesn't this make perfect sense? The angels had always been but ministers and messengers, but only Christ is the “Son.” In other words, only Christ is the **“Only begotten Son of God.”** So who has the **“more excellent name?”** Christ has **“the more excellent name,”** for He is called the Son of God.

And when did Christ inherit this name “Son”? Christ did not inherit this name in His incarnation or His exaltation. Christ inherited His name “Son” in accordance with His Father’s eternal decrees (Ephesians 1:3-5). This is why Paul was able to say in **Ephesians 1:3-5, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, (4) just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love (5) [And what else did He do before the foundation of the world?] He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself.”** So when did Christ inherit His name “Son?” He did not inherit His name Son in His incarnation or in His exaltation. He inherited the name “Son” in the eternal of degrees or in other words God the Father has always

considered Christ to be His Son and Christ always considered Himself to be His Father's Son.

So why was Christ entitled, after His incarnation and after made purification of sins, to return back to place of highest honor at the right of God? He had a **“more excellent name!”** And what was that “name?” Son!

So hopefully now we understand what the author meant when he, in finishing his seven-fold description of Christ in **Hebrews 1:4**, described Christ as having become as much better than angels as He inherited a more excellent **name** than they.”

But now let me try and make this personal to us. If we, in our desire to be set free from sin, have accepted Christ as our Lord and Savior by grace through faith, and have been placed into Christ by the baptizing work of the Spirit, could we also be considered sons of God? Yes! Absolutely! Not in the same unique way as Christ but sons by adoption according to **Ephesians 1:5**.

So if God sees us in Christ as His Sons and if this is what we are called by Him, then can we as God's adoptive sons consider ourselves as possessing a more excellent name than the angels? Absolutely!

So now let me ask you a question. Is this more excellent name and the honor associated with this name presently apparent to the world around us? And what is the answer? No! It is not apparent.

But our more excellent name and the honor associated with the name will one day be very apparent to the world. And when will that day be? Our more excellent name and the honor associated with the name will become very apparent to the world when we are unveiled as God's sons as we return with Him to this earth to set up His millennial kingdom. This is what Paul was speaking of **Romans 8:19** when he spoke of creation as anxiously longing for the revealing of the sons of God.

So perhaps if the world were to look at us this morning they would not see any kings or queens, or princes or princesses, or prime ministers, or presidents or vice presidents, or senators, or congressmen, or mayors or even the sons or daughters of any of these people. And perhaps because of this they may conclude that there may not be anyone among us of significance or

importance. But they would be wrong! And one day when Christ rises up from His seated position at the right hand of the throne of God to return to earth to make His enemies a footstool for His feet, as prophesied in **Psalm 110:1**, and we are revealed with Him as the sons of God, the world will then not only know who Christ is but also who we are.

May we by God's grace understand that not only has Christ inherited a more excellent name than the angels, but that we also in Christ have inherited a more excellent name.