

A Bible Study of

Hebrews

by Joe Liana

The human author of the book of Hebrews does not identify himself, and little evidence is presented within the letter which would conclusively lead to the author's identity. Hebrews 2:3-4 suggests the author was not an apostle or eyewitness. However, Paul tells Timothy that all scripture is inspired by God, therefore this book has the same author as the rest of the scripture, namely the Holy Spirit.

The destination of this letter is also unknown, but from the content of the letter we know it was directed to a Jewish audience. (Jew-Gentile problems are not mentioned) It deals with the problems faced by a Jewish believer and also reaches out to the unbelieving Jew. However, a Gentile would find this letter invaluable in explaining the Old Testament and in understanding his Jewish brother. It would give the Gentile a deeper knowledge of Christ as priest and sacrifice.

The letter was probably penned between 60 and 65 A.D. The general theme of the letter is the superiority of Christ and the superiority of the new system over the old.

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

God, according to His purpose and plan, chose to communicate with man. Man, although he never stops trying, cannot rise above his physical nature to find or communicate with God. Therefore, everything man knows of God has been communicated to him by God. God chose to reveal himself to man from the beginning. His revelation however, was not complete or continuous. He communicated with man at different times and in various ways. The Old Testament, which is a record of the early communications of God to man, was written over a period of some 1500 years by over 40 writers. God communicated to man by dreams, visions, visits and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. From Adam to Moses God seemed to deal more directly with man. From Moses to Malachi prophets inspired by the Holy Ghost spoke God's word. God's word is even presented in different ways. The Old Testament is history, poetry, law, song and prophecy.

The point is that God chose to communicate with man. He communicated in the Old Testament a promise of salvation and redemption. He communicated this in a progressive manner, over a long period of time, by many individuals, and in different ways.

"Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls. Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven; which things the angels desire to look into."

I Peter 1:9-12

"We have a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

II Peter 1:19-21

1:2 - "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;"

The promise was communicated by God through men, but the fulfillment was carried out and communicated by God directly through Jesus Christ. The

time is designated as the last days because with the ascension of Christ and the completion of the New Testament scriptures, God's communication to man was complete.

"But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."
John 14:26

"For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God." Acts 20:27

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works."
II Tim. 3:16-17

Jesus Christ took part in the creation of all things but is appointed to inherit all things. The bible tells us how this is possible.

a) Jesus Christ was indeed God, taking part in the creation of all things.

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."
John 1:1-3

b) He however humbled himself, putting himself in subjection to the Father.

"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal to God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."
Phil. 2:6-8

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man"
Heb. 2:9

c) God in turn has appointed Jesus Christ heir of all things. All creation will be subject once again to him.

"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."
Phil. 2:9-11

"Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: for by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;" Col. 1:15-19

1:3 - "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;"

Four additional attributes of Jesus Christ are presented as further evidence that Jesus Christ is superior to all things.

a) Jesus being the brightness or radiance of God's glory has been described as the relationship between the sun and the sunlight. Just as the glory of the sun is seen through its light, so the glory of God can only be seen in Jesus Christ.

"Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." John 8:12

b) Jesus Christ is God manifested in the flesh.

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me. If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him. Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us. Jesus saith unto him, have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." John 14:6-10

"For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." Col. 1:9

c) Christ is the creator, he is the heir, and currently he is the upholder or sustainer of all things. All things are held together and carried forward to the desired end by the power of his word.

d) Sitting at the right hand of God symbolizes the exalted position held by Christ. However, before taking this position, he fulfilled his office of both

priest and victim, providing a once for all sacrifice for the forgiveness of sin. Christ's sitting down is a sign of the honor.

"And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Phil. 2:9

It is a sign of authority.

"Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him." I Peter 3:22

It is a sign that his work is done.

"But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God;" Heb. 10:11

He sits down to intercede.

"Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Rom. 8:34

1:4-5 - "Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. 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?"

The very lives of the Jews centered around the old covenant. True scriptural teaching as well as centuries of tradition and interpretation influenced their thinking. Jews saw angels as created beings second only to God and much superior to man. The angels played an important role in the old covenant.

"Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it." Acts 7:53

"Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator." Gal. 3:19

It is necessary for the writer to prove the superiority of Christ as compared to angels, in order that they may see Christ as the true mediator of the everlasting covenant. This covenant is not only superior but also the fulfillment of the old.

Jesus Christ is superior to angels for he has inherited a greater title. The title is Son, and therefore heir of all things. Christ did not have the title Son, until he became man within the realm of time. He was first made inferior in form, but retained His superiority through inheritance of the title Son.

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man." Heb. 2:9

"And Jesus came and spake unto them saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Matt. 28:18

The writer must prove his argument using the old testament.

"I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." Psalm 2:7

"I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men:" II Sam. 7:14

These arguments are necessary not only for the unbelieving Jew, but also for the Jewish Christian who tries to incorporate Christ into the old system which is so much a point of his life.

1:6 - "And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him."

Christ is superior because God commands angels to worship the Son. Christ became a man through the will and power of God, thereby becoming the Son.

"And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Luke 1:35

The description 'first begotten' does not refer to time but to position. Christ is the firstborn Son, the one of authority and power.

Angels worshipped Christ at his birth and angels ministered to him during his earthly life.

"And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior,

which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. An suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."
Luke 2:10-14

"Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him." Matt 4:11

1:7-8 - "And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire. 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"

The author has presented Christ as the Son and therefore as being greater than the angels. He now goes on to show not only the superiority of Christ, but his deity.

Old Testament scripture is used to show that angels are created beings Just as wind and fire, angels are God's creation ministering to his will and used by him for his purpose.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, thou art very great; thou art clothed with honour and majesty. Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment: who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain: who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters: who maketh the clouds his chariot: who walketh upon the wings of the wind: who maketh his angels spirits: his ministers a flaming fire:"
Psalm 104:1-4

Not only is Christ the Son and heir, but actually God Almighty. The Father calls the Son, God! Psalm 45 is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

"Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre."
Psalm 45:6

"For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace."
Isaiah 9:6

When upon this earth Christ also claimed to be God.

"Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill him, because he not only had broken the sabbath, but said also that God was his Father, making himself equal with God."

John 5:18

"Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of these works do ye stone me? The Jews answered him saying, For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God."
John 10:30-33

The kingdom of God is eternal and his kingdom will be a kingdom of righteousness.

1:9 - "Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows."

The righteousness of this kingdom is a reflection of the purity of his character. Jesus Christ loved righteousness and hated sin. His very nature is righteousness, never having known sin.

"This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."
I John 1:5

Light -vs- darkness. The things of the world versus the things of God. The Spirit versus the flesh. Throughout the scripture righteousness and sin are presented as opposites, completely opposed and not able to be compromised.

"Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God."

James 4:4

It was Christ, the anointed one, who overcame sin and death. It is this righteousness and his victory which is applied to the believer. Because of sin he was a 'man of sorrows' while on this earth. He arose in glory. He is now the source of gladness and peace to all who believe.

"He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath born out griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted."
Isaiah 53:3-4

"Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience."
Rom. 5:1-3

Believers, being partakers of his nature, are commanded to hate sin and love righteousness.

"And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."
Eph. 4:24

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled."
Matt. 5:6

"But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."
Matt 6:33

"Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless."

II Peter 3:13-14

Note: This verse, Hebrews 1:9, is taken from Psalm 45:7.

1:10 - "And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thy hands:"

The deity of Christ is emphasized as he is presented as eternal and as creator. "In the beginning" is probably a reference to Genesis 1:1. Christ existed before all things for he made the heavens and the earth. He created the habitation of angels and the habitation of men.

All of the attributes which Israel attributed to God, namely, eternal, creator, and sustainer of all things has been applied to the still unnamed Son. It follows that if the Son existed before the angels and even created them, he obviously is greater.

"Of old hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens are the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old as a garment: as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end. The children of thy servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before thee."
Psalm 102:25-28

1:11-12 - "They shall perish; but thou remainest; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment; 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."

To further show the superiority of Christ over all things, thus proving his deity, the author now compares Christ to creation. Even though created by an eternal God, creation is not eternal but under the degenerating effects of sin.

"For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now."
Rom. 8:22

Creation is growing old just as an article of clothing which wears out. Creation will perish.

"Lift up your eyes to the heavens, and look upon the earth beneath: for the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment, and they that dwell therein shall die in like manner: but my salvation shall be for ever, and my righteousness shall not be abolished."
Isaiah 51:6

"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."
II Peter 3:10

The Son is not subject to decay. Being perfect he remains the same. He is eternal.

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away."
Matt. 24:25

"Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever."
Heb. 13:8

1:13 - "But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool?"

The author concludes and summarizes by turning his attention back to the angels. No place in scripture is an angel rewarded. They do not receive gifts, attain any special distinction or are promoted in rank. The obvious answer to the question in this verse is 'none'. However, this quote, taken from Psalms 110:1, refers to Christ. Christ has been invited to sit at the right hand of God, being given all authority, distinction, and honor. The destiny of Christ is to rule until all is put under his feet.

"For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet."
I Cor. 15:25

Psalm 110:1 is the most often quoted old testament verse in the new testament. Jesus quoted it to show the Messiah would be divine.

"The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool?" Matt. 22:44

1:14 - "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

Angels are created beings. They were made by God who now commands them to minister to believers. Angels are active in the spirit realm, working on our behalf.

"And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, an host compassed the city both with horses and chariots. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my master! how shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha." II Kings 6:15-17

"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven." Matt. 18:10

It is the angels God uses to carry out his commands as seen throughout the book of Revelation. Angels will gather the elect at the end.

"And then shall they see the Son of man coming in the clouds with great power and glory, and then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven." Mark 13: 26-27

The believer is also an heir. The believer has been adopted through Jesus Christ. As heirs angels minister to the believer.

"The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together." Rom. 8:16-17

"Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ." Gal. 4:7

"Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?" I Cor 6:3

The Son has been shown to be eternal and also the appointed heir. These things have been shown to be a fulfillment of the old testament scriptures. That the Son is divine, and also creator, proves his superiority to the old

system and also to the angels which ordained it. This first chapter is an introduction to the Son. The letter will build upon this introduction showing us the work of Christ as being the focus and the joining of the old system and the new.