

Hebrews 1

Introduction

If you were to stop and look at your life prior to coming to know Christ, you would be aware of the fact God was speaking to you in fragmentary and varied fashions, through a friend, a tape, a book, a dream, a life-threatening situation or crisis of some sort. However, the communication was partial, fragmentary, in bits and pieces, coming to you through different channels. And then came the day that you accepted Christ into your life and communication with Him opened up in a full dimension. And yet, is this not the pattern of our Christian experience? We find changes from the imperfect to the perfect and the partial to the complete. All of these initial points of revelation look forward to the Day of the Lord when our understanding will be complete and perfect. In the words of Paul, "For now we see in a mirror, indistinctly and dimly, but then, face to face, now I know in part, but then I shall know fully just as I also have been fully known" (I Cor. 13:12).

The first few verses of Hebrews 1 portray a long sweep of salvation-history, which may be subsumed under the category of the fragmentary, partial, varied, incomplete and imperfect. The writer of the book of Hebrew argues that in contrast to such partial and inconclusive revelation, God has definitively spoken in His Son. All intermediaries and angelic beings serve a subordinate role to the all-important oral message from God who addressed humanity in one who is His Son. The direct, open and public speech, verbalized through the Son counters an incipient gnosticism, promulgated by teachers who claimed sole possession to divine wisdom (I Cor. 1:20-3:16). The chapter may have well originated as a hymn, which was part of early Christian worship, testifying to the supreme revelation of God through His Son.

Structural Analysis

The first four sentences of the Greek text are actually one sentence with one subject, one main verb, and an indirect object, expressing the finality of God's self-revelation, "God spoke in His Son" (ὁ θεὸς . . . ἐλάλησεν ἐν υἱῷ). From a grammatical point of view, this is the affirmation. This verse serves as a fitting introduction to the book of Hebrews. This affirmation is made using contrasting clauses in vss. 1-2b. What follows in vss. 3b-4 is a series of relative clauses that identify the Son by His attributes and actions. The last block of material is introduced by the term "angels" in v. 4, "having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they." The introduction of angels serves as a bridge or hinge for the rest of the chapter, which underscores the contrast between the Son and the angels, as various OT texts are used to buttress this central affirmation.

In terms of the argument, the thought of ch. 1 may be expressed through the following flow of thought:

***God has definitively spoken in His Son (vss. 1-2a),
Who is singularly distinguished by His attributes and actions (vss. 2b-4)?
and superiority over the angels (vss. 4-14)***

The Text (Structure and Comment)

God has definitively spoken in His Son (vss. 1-2a),

The old

1·Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως

in many parts and many ways

πάλαι

long ago

ὁ θεὸς λαλήσας

God, after He spoke

τοῖς πατράσιν

to the fathers

ἐν τοῖς προφήταις

in the prophets

The new

[implied opposite of fragmentary and varied]

[whole and unified]

ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων

in these last days

ἐλάλησεν

spoke

ἡμῖν

to us

ἐν υἱῷ,

in [the] Son

Clear contrast dominates the first two verses, a contrast between the old and new periods of divine "speaking." The verb "to speak" (λαλέω) is frequent in the book of Hebrews, often used to convey divine revelation through the mode of speaking:

2:2 For if the message having been spoken (λαληθεῖς) was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution,

3 how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

It was spoken (λαλεῖσθαι) at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him,

2:5 For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking (λαλοῦμεν)

4:8 For if Joshua had given them rest, God would not speak (οὐκ ἂν...ἐλάλει) later of another day.

5:5 So also Christ did not exalt himself to be made a high priest, but was appointed by him who spoke (ὁ λαλήσας) to him,

“Thou art my Son,
today I have begotten thee”;

11:18 of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your descendants be named (ἐλαλήθη)”

12:25 See that you do not refuse him who is speaking (τὸν λαλοῦντα) For if they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, much less shall we escape if we reject him who warns from heaven.

Two adverbs convey the idea of partial revelation and they are alliterated in a rhythmical balance. The first adverb "in many portions" (πολυμερῶς) expresses the sense of many parts, fragments or time periods (e.g., patriarchs, Moses, theocracy, exile). The second adverb "in many ways" (πολυτρόπως) reveals the various modes of communication (e.g., storm, thunder, singers, prophets, oracle). Since the two verses are dominated by contrast, the two adverbs may be contrasted with an implied "whole" and "unified" form of revelation that has happened in Jesus Christ. The temporal expression "long ago" is contrasted with the term "in these last days"; the aorist participle "having spoken" (λαλήσας) is contrasted with the aorist indicative, "he spoke" (ἐλάλησεν); the recipients

are contrasted, "to the fathers" vss. "to us"; the personal agency of speaking is contrasted, "in the prophets" (plural) vss. "in His Son" (singular).

The writer says that the definitive and conclusive speech of God has occurred "in these last days." Although this text was written two thousand years ago, the Church in the twentieth century still lives in the "last days." The expression "at the end of these days" is not to be understood in mere chronological terms but in eschatological thought, in that the writer affirms the ultimacy of Christ; God has acted in a "once-for-all" manner to reveal Himself and save His people. Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension mark the beginning of the end; they are eschatological events. Jewish teachers distinguished between two ages:

"a present age," "this age" (hzh <λω ὁ αἰὼν οὗτος, ὁ νῦν καιρός)

"that age," "the age to come" (abh <λω, ὁ μέλλον αἰὼν, ὁ αἰὼν ὁ ἐρχόμενος, ὁ αἰὼν ἐκεῖνος)

Between the present age of imperfection and the age of the perfect, the Jewish sages placed the days of the Messiah, sometimes in one age, sometimes in the other. There was common agreement that the passage from one age to another would be marked by intense sorrow, convulsion, anguish and birth pangs (cf. Matt. 24:8). Thus, since the writers of the NT were conscious of the critical importance of the time through which they were passing, they speak of their own time as "the last [of the] days."

It is important to note that the author identifies himself and his readers with those to whom God spoke in the past, "our fathers," i.e., "our ancestors." He is one with his readers as they are one with the OT people of God represented by Israel's leaders. Further, the writer is committed to the unity of revelation from the past to the present. There is a line of continuity; God began with Israel and is presently at work in the life and witness of the Church.

Who is singularly distinguished by His attributes and actions (vss. 2b-4)?

ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων,
whom He appointed the heir of all things
δι' οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας·
through whom also he created the world
ὅς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης
who is the radiance of His glory
καὶ χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ,
and the exact stamp of His nature
φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ,
upholding all things [universe] by the word of His power
καθαρισμὸν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος
when he made purification for sins
ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς,
he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high

There are seven clauses wherein the writer affirms the superiority of the nature and activity of the Son to every previous form of revelation, past, present and future

Heir of all things. While the first clause celebrates the end yet in store ("heir"), it also affirms the beginning, "through whom he created the world." Thus, "the end answers to the beginning. Through Him God called into being, the temporal order of

things, and He is the heir of their last issue."¹ In Hebrew culture, the son is also the heir; in this case the original purpose of creation is yet to be realized in and through Him, "All things were created in Him and unto Him" (Col. 1:15-16). Even as Psa. 2 is used with reference to the unique position of the Son (v. 5), "You are my Son," so the theme of the Son's inheritance is likewise directly related to Psa. 2:

Psa. 2:8 Ask of me, and I will make the nations your *heritage*,
and the ends of the earth your *possession*

While His inheritance does include the nations and ends of the earth, the cosmological sweep of the declarations in ch. 1 orients the reader to the universal inheritance of the world and age to come. His right as an heir is based on His relationship of Sonship,² which will not change with the course of time; indeed the inheritance will open up in a fuller dimension in the future as is true of human sons and daughters:

Gal.4:1 I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no better than a slave, though he is the owner of all the estate;

7 So through God you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son then an heir.

Agent of creation. Corresponding to the future, Christ is also the creative mediator of the universe in all of its successive phases, past, present or future. The idea of agency, "through whom" (δι' οὗ) is elsewhere affirmed in the NT:

Jn. 1:3 all things were made through him (δι' αὐτοῦ) and without him was not anything made that was made.

Col.1:16 for in him (ἐν αὐτῷ) all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

1 Cor.8:6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom (δι' οὗ) are all things and through whom we exist.

The Son mediated the creation of "the worlds/ages" (τοὺς αἰῶνας), which may be understood in a spatial manner,³ but may also refer to a "whole (ὁ κόσμος), or as an order which exists through time developed in successive stages."⁴ The term "aeons" (αἰῶνες) may counter a gnostic thrust, which positioned superhuman forces ("aeons"), responsible for the various spheres and periods of the cosmos. Paul argues against such rulers of the present age ("aeon"):

1 Cor. 2:6 Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age (τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου) or of the rulers of this age (τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου), who are doomed to pass away.⁷ But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages (πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων) for our glorification.⁸ None of the rulers of this age (τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου) understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

¹ B.F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., 1973 repr.), p. 7.

² See also Gal. 4:7; and Rom. 8:17 where sonship is vitally linked with heirship.

³ BAGD, p. 27.

⁴ Westcott, p. 8. See also Prov. 8:27-31 and Wisd. of Sol. 9:1ff. for references to the creative aspect of divine wisdom. In 6:5, the writer affirms that the readers participate in the "powers of the coming age (αἰῶνος)."

Eph.2:2 in which you once walked, following the age (τὸν αἰῶνα) of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.

As Jewett notes, "This personified understanding of aeon is typical for the Hellenistic mystery religions, where a god by this name plays a substantial role."⁵ Attitudes about such "aeons" may well have included fear, alienation and human powerlessness, noted later as "fear" (2:14-18), human weakness (4:14-16) and sin (9:23-28).⁶ The Son is no such part of the sphere of the "emanations"; He is the one who created the "ages."

The radiance of God's glory. In His person, Jesus embodies the brightness or radiant light of God. The term "radiance" (ἀπαύγασμα) designates the entire bright image, not simply a reflection of some other light source. The images of light and glory are inextricably knit together in the prophetic hope in both the OT and NT, and finds concrete expression in the Shekinah:

Isa. 40:5 And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

Isaiah 46:13 I bring near my deliverance, it is not far off, and my salvation will not tarry; I will put salvation in Zion, for Israel my glory."

II Cor. 4:6 For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

Exod. 24:16 The glory of the LORD settled on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days; and on the seventh day he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud.

Jn. 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt ("pitched His tent") among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father.

2 Pet. 1:17 For when he received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,"

As Barclay notes, "The Son is the radiance of His glory just as the ray is the light of the sun."⁷

The exact stamp of His nature. The term "exact stamp" (χαρακτήρ) originally designated a "tool for engraving," a die, stamp or seal, which conveyed the same impression to other substances and came to mean the distinguishing peculiarity.⁸ The term "nature" (ὕποστασις) indicates "substantial nature, essence, actual being, reality."⁹ Thus, the combination of the two terms signifies the following link: just as a coin or wax seal bears the exact impress of a die so Jesus, as the Son bears the very real representation of God's real being. The metaphor of the die passes over into the reality in that the writer is not expressing "what merely seems to be," an image of something else, but what actually exists, God's real being. Since Jesus is the radiance of God's glory, the impress of His very essence, He participates in the very being of God.

⁵ Robert Jewett, *Letter to Pilgrims*, (New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1981), p. 22.

⁶ See Jewett for a fuller discussion, pp. 22-23.

⁷ William Barclay, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1957), p.

⁸ MM, p. 683. BAGD, p. 884.

⁹ BAGD, 0. 854.

Sustains all things [universe] by the word of His power. The same Son who was the active agent in the creation of the universe (v. 2) is active in the sustaining of the same universe by His powerful word. In 11:3, the writer affirms that the universe was called into being by an utterance (ῥῆμα) of God, and is very similar to the expression here; "the word of His power" (τὸ ῥῆμα τῆς δυνάμεως) is the means by which the universe subsists.

Upholding (φέρων pres. part.) is an ongoing activity of the Son, a "bearing, which includes movement and progress towards an end."¹⁰ Paul expresses a similar thought, "He is before all things, and in him all things *hold together*" (Co. 1:17). The Son provides the dynamic coherence that gives unity to "all things":

Heb.2:8 putting *everything* (πάντα) in subjection under his feet." Now in putting *everything* (τὰ πάντα) in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control.

As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.

Heb. 2:10 For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom *all things* (τὰ πάντα) exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.

He made purification for sins. Beyond the creative and sustaining power of the Son, the writer affirms the atoning work of the Son, the central event that will serve as a guide through the entire epistle. The use of the middle voice in the participle (ποιησάμενος) may well express the idea of Christ in His own Person making purification through Himself for the cleansing for sin. This affirmation, early in the epistle, anticipates the full discussion of Jesus' high priestly role in chs. 9-10; Jesus is the one true high priest who alone could make atonement for sins "once and for all" (ἕφαπαξ):

Heb.9:12 he entered *once for all* (ἕφαπαξ) into the Holy Place, taking not the blood of goats and calves *but his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption* (διὰ δὲ τοῦ ἰδίου αἵματος ...αἰώνιαν λύτρωσιν εὐράμενος).

Heb.9:14 how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, *purify* (καθαριεῖ) your conscience from dead works to serve the living God.

9:22 Indeed, under the law almost everything *is purified* (καθαρίζεται) with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

9:23 Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things *to be purified* (καθαρίζεσθαι) with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

9:26 for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age *to put away sin by the sacrifice* (διὰ τῆς θυσίας αὐτοῦ) of himself.

10:2 Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered? If the worshipers had once *been cleansed* (κακαθαρισμένους), they would no longer have any consciousness of sin.

10:18 Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any *offering for sin* (προσφορὰ περὶ ἁμαρτίας).

¹⁰ Westcott, p. 14.

10:26 For if we sin deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer *remains a sacrifice for sins* (περὶ ἁμαρτιῶν ἀπολείπεται θυσία). *He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.* The writer then affirms Christ's conclusive act is taking the seat of honor and authority. Mention of the right hand focuses upon the place of honor, not the place itself.¹¹ The text affirms the fulfillment of Psa. 110, which was understood in a messianic sense in the Jewish religious expectation:

Heb.1:13 But to what angel has he ever said,
 “*Sit at my right hand* (κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου)
 till I make thy enemies
 a stool for thy feet”?

8:1 Now the point in what we are saying is this: we have such a high priest, one who is *seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven* (ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θρόνου τῆς μεγαλωσύνης)

10:12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, *he sat down at the right hand of God* (ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τοῦ θεοῦ)

12:2 looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and *is seated at the right hand of the throne of God* (ἐν δεξιᾷ τε τοῦ θρόνου τοῦ θεοῦ κεκράθικεν).

Psa. 110 is used elsewhere in the NT¹² to refer to the glorious and victorious ascension of Christ and is also referred to in the Gospel tradition.¹³ Later in the text, the majestic seating of the Son may be contrasted with the inferior position of angels who continue to stand and serve in the heavenly court (1:13). The term "Majesty on high" (ἡ μεγαλωσύνη ἐν ὑψηλοῖς) communicates the greatness of God (cf. 8:1). Even though local imagery is used for the ineffable, it nonetheless conveys the completion, finality and majesty of His victorious work.

In a summary manner, the seven affirmations convey the finality and totality of Christ; He is the agent and sustainer of creation; He embodies God; He is the revealer of God; He fulfills the prophetic office in that God has definitively spoken through Him; He embodies the high-priestly office who has made the once-for-all sacrifice; He assumes the kingly role, seated beside the Majesty on high.

Substantiation for the Son's superiority over the angels (vss. 4-14). Verse 4 serves as a bridge to the argument of the second portion of the epistle; the theme of the Son's superiority over angels is introduced and is followed by seven OT quotes (vss. 5-13) which the writer summons as proof of the Son's superiority over angels. Verse 14 serves as a summary statement of the proper relationship between the Son and the angels. The writer claims that the Son is superior because He has been granted a better name.¹⁴ In the NT, the ascension marks the point at which the Son received the better name:

¹¹ Matt. 20:21, 23; Mk. 10:37, 40.

¹² I Pet. 3:22; Eph. 4:10.

¹³ Mk. 12:36 par.; 14:63 par.

¹⁴ The comparative "better" (κρείττων; κρείσσω) is central to the argument of the book: "better things that belong to salvation" (6:9); "inferior blessed by the greater [Melchizedek]" (7:7)"a better hope [than former commandment]" (7:19); "Jesus the pledge of a better covenant" (7:22); "Christ has obtained a ministry which is as much better than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on

Phil. 2:9 Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name,
 Eph. 1:20 which he accomplished in Christ when he raised him from the dead and made him sit at his right hand in the heavenly places,²¹ far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come;

Through the following seven OT quotes, the writer both affirms the Son's superiority over angels and finds in Jesus, the expressed fulfillment of the preceding words of God. It may be helpful to look at the texts in their OT context as we look at their application in Hebrews 1.

Hebrews Text	OT Reference	OT Context & Form	OT Meaning	Application in Hebrews
1:5a	Psa. 2:7	Royal Psalm	Historical king who is inaugurated; today = day of inauguration	Historical king foreshadows the Messiah; today = day of resurrection
1:5b	II Sam.7:14; I Chron. 17:13	Build a house for the ark	David's seed (house) that the Lord will build (Messianic)	Promise fulfilled in David's seed
1:6	LXX Deut. 32:43; LXX of Psa. 96:7	Prophetic history issues in judgment	When the Lord is revealed, there will be judgment	Coming of Christ evokes worship of angels; firstborn is representative
1:7	Psa. 104:4	God's presence in nature	Angels are like natural elements, are transitory and subservient	Subservient and transient angels are contrasted with permanence of Son
1:8-9	Psa. 45:6-7	Royal wedding psalm	Permanence of rule, anointing and celebration by his peers (fellows)	Affirmation of deity, Messianic anointing and celebration by angels (fellows)
1:10-12	Psa. 102:25-27	Individual complaint psalm	Unchangeable creator God over against changing creation	Eternality of Son over against changing creation
1:13	Psa. 110:1	Enthronment and Messianic psalm	Promise of a victorious Messianic king	Ascension of Christ with honor and authority

Heb. 1:5a For to what angel did God ever say,

**“Thou art my Son,
 today I have begotten thee”?**

5 Τίνι γὰρ εἶπεν ποτε τῶν ἀγγέλων·
 υἱός μου εἶ σύ,
 ἐγὼ σήμερον γεγέννηκα σέ

better promises" (8:6); "with better sacrifices than these" (9:23); "you yourselves had a better possession" (10:34); "they desire a better country" (11:16); "they might rise again to a better life" (11:35); "something better for us" (11:40); "the sprinkled blood that speaks better than the blood of Abel" (12:24).

Hebrews Text	OT Reference	OT Context & Form	OT Meaning	Application in Hebrews
1:5a	Psa. 2:7	Royal Psalm	Historical king who is inaugurated; today = day of inauguration	Historical king foreshadows the Messiah; today = day of resurrection

The question, "For to what angel did God ever say . . .?" is rhetorical.¹⁵ The obvious answer is that God never spoke so gloriously to an angel. Although the angels are sometimes called "sons of God" in a collective sense (Psa. 29:1; 89:6), no angel is individually given the title "Son of God." Similarly, the nation of Israel as a whole is sometimes called "son" (Exod. 4:22; Hos. 11:1), but no individual Jew is given this exalted title.

Psalm 2 was originally a royal psalm, which may have been composed for the coronation of a king in Israel's past. The song takes into purview the conflict of the Lord and Israel's anointed (Psa. 2:2) with the kings of the earth; the psalm also portrays the successful conquest of the nations. In Psa. 2:7, the temporal affirmation, "today I have begotten you" originally referred to the day of coronation, when Israel's king was inaugurated into his royal rule. However, in Israel's history, there was never a time in which the conquest of the nations was successfully achieved. Thus, the fulfillment of the promise lay still in the future. In the book of Acts, Peter uses Psa. 2 as part of a prayer, with respect to the conflict between the early Church and the religious authorities:

Acts 4:25 who by the mouth of our father David,
thy servant, didst say by the Holy Spirit,
'Why did the Gentiles rage,
and the peoples imagine vain things?
26 The kings of the earth set themselves in array,
and the rulers were gathered together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed'—

In Acts 13:33-24, Paul uses the language of Psa. 2, particularly the term "today" to refer to the resurrection:

Acts 13:33 this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus;
as also it is written in the second psalm,
'Thou art my Son,
today I have begotten thee.'
34 And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead,
no more to return to corruption, he spoke in this way,
'I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.'

Heb. 1:5b Or again,

**"I will be to him a father,
and he shall be to me a son"?**

καὶ πάλιν·

ἐγὼ ἔσομαι αὐτῷ εἰς πατέρα,

¹⁵ Compare with v. 14, "Are they not all ministering spirits...?"; "How shall we escape. . .?" (2:3); "Who were they that heard and yet were rebellious? Was it not all those who left . . .?" (3:16); "what further need would there have been for another priest?," (7:11); "what son is there whom his father does not discipline?," (12:7).

καὶ αὐτὸς ἔσται μοι εἰς υἱὸν

Hebrews Text	OT Reference	OT Context & Form	OT Meaning	Application in Hebrews
1:5b	II Sam.7:14; I Chron. 17:13	Build a house for the ark	David's seed (house) that the Lord will build (Messianic)	Promise fulfilled in David's seed with a new relationship

In the OT setting, David expresses a desire to build a house for the ark of God; he is troubled by the inconsistency that he as the king should live in a palace while the ark of God is not housed in its own sanctuary. In response to David's desire to build a "house," (II Sam. 7:1-4), the Lord says that He "will make you a house" (II Sam. 7:11); as the promise continues, it is clear that the house that the Lord will raise up constitutes David's offspring. Solomon is the immediate candidate who will be related to God as a son to his Father; however, the promise merges with messianic expectation to the One with a unique relationship with God as Father, as it looks forward to a dynasty that will last forever. Clearly, the "Son of David" serves as the starting point for the promise as the prophet indicates; however, since the kingdom passed away from the Davidic line through the exile, it became necessary to look for another "seed" that would issue in an eternal kingdom.¹⁶ This new seed will not be the builder of a literal Temple, but the conquering King who will triumph over the Lord's enemies.

Heb.1:6 And again, when he brings the first-born into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him."

ὅταν δὲ πάλιν εἰσαγάγῃ τὸν πρωτότοκον εἰς τὴν οἰκουμένην, λέγει· καὶ προσκυνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες ἄγγελοι θεοῦ.

Hebrews Text	OT Reference	OT Context & Form	OT Meaning	Application in Hebrews
1:6	LXX Deut. 32:43; LXX of Psa. 96:7	Prophetic history issues in judgment	When the Lord is revealed, there will be judgment	Coming of Christ evokes worship of angels; firstborn is representative

The Son is identified here as the "first-born" (πρωτότοκος) in an absolute manner, while the term is found elsewhere in the NT in a relational sense:

- Rom. 8:29 "the firstborn among many brothers"
- Col. 1:15 "the firstborn of every creature"
- Col. 1:18 "the firstborn from the dead"
- Rev. 1:5 "the firstborn of the dead"

The term does not designate the actual begetting of the Son, but His supremacy in rank and privilege, the relation of the Son to the entire family, which is united in Him.

The third quotation, "Let all the angels of God worship Him," is taken from the LXX of Deut. 32:43:

LXX	English Bible
Deut.32:43	

¹⁶ Isa. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; Jn. 2:19.

<p>43 εὐφράνθητε, οὐρανοί, ἅμα αὐτῷ, καὶ προσκυνησάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες υἱοὶ θεοῦ. εὐφράνθητε, ἔθνη, μετὰ τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ, καὶ ἐνισχυσάτωσαν αὐτῷ πάντες ἄγγελοι θεοῦ, ὅτι τὸ αἷμα τῶν υἱῶν αὐτοῦ ἐκδικᾶται, καὶ ἐκδικήσει καὶ ἀνταποδώσει δίκην τοῖς ἐχθροῖς καὶ τοῖς μισοῦσιν ἀνταποδώσει, καὶ ἐκκαθαριεῖ κύριος τὴν γῆν τοῦ λαοῦ αὐτοῦ.</p>	
<p>Rejoice, you heavens with him, and <u>let all the angels of God worship him</u>; rejoice you Gentiles, with his people, and let all the sons of God strengthen themselves in him; for he will avenge the blood of his sons, and he will render vengeance, and recompense and justice to his enemies, and will reward them that hate him; and the Lord shall <u>purge the land of his people.</u></p>	<p>Deut.32:43 “Praise his people, O you nations; or he avenges the blood of his servants, and takes vengeance on his adversaries, and makes expiation for the land of his people.”</p>
<p>Psa. 96:7 7 αἰσχυνθήτωσαν πάντες οἱ προσκυνοῦντες τοῖς γλυπτοῖς οἱ ἐγκαυχώμενοι ἐν τοῖς εἰδώλοις αὐτῶν, <u>προσκυνήσατε αὐτῷ, πάντες οἱ ἄγγελοι αὐτοῦ.</u></p>	
<p>Let all that worship graven images be ashamed, who boast of their idols; <u>worship him, all you his angels</u></p>	<p>Psalm 97: All worshipers of images are put to shame, who make their boast in worthless idols; <u>all gods bow down before him.</u></p>

The passage from Deut. 32 is part of Moses' last song, in which the history of Israel issues in a final and decisive revelation of the Lord in judgment. What is striking is that in the OT passage, the Lord (Yahweh) is the One to be worshipped. The coming of Yahweh in judgment is transposed into the coming of the Son evoking worship since all subordinate powers (human and spiritual) will recognize His absolute authority. However, in the text of Hebrews, the Son is the One who is worshipped by the angels. These angels are no independent powers or forces; they live in submission to their respective services and are summoned to vibrant worship. While the previous quotations have identified Him as the Son of God, this passage marks Him out as the One to whom angelic worship is rendered.

**Heb. 1:7 Of the angels he says,
 “Who makes his angels winds,
 and his servants flames of fire.”**
 καὶ πρὸς μὲν τοὺς ἀγγέλους λέγει·
 ὁ ποιῶν τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ πνεύματα
 καὶ τοὺς λειτουργοὺς αὐτοῦ πυρὸς φλόγα,

Hebrews Text	OT Reference	OT Context & Form	OT Meaning	Application in Hebrews
1:7	Psa. 104:4	God's presence in nature	Angels are like natural elements, are transitory and subservient	Subservient and transient angels are contrasted with permanence of Son

The text begins with a contrast ("on the one hand" μέν) that is answered by its counterpart in v. 8 ("on the other hand" δέ); thus, the first clause relates the nature of angels while the second clause affirms the nature of the Son. Psalm 104 is a psalm of praise, expressing the wonder of God and His presence that is mirrored in nature. The thought of the psalm is that people see material objects or feel natural forces when they experience nature. People see clouds (Psa. 104:3), feel wind (v. 4), see and feel rain (v. 5), hear thunder (v. 7); yet, the poet says that God is very present and active in these "natural" forces and events. Thus, behind the natural force of wind. The source of the quote is again found in the LXX:

Psalm 103 4 ὁ ποιῶν τοὺς ἀγγέλους αὐτοῦ πνεύματα καὶ τοὺς λειτουργοὺς αὐτοῦ πῦρ φλέγον.	
Who makes his angels spirits, and his ministers a flaming fire	Psalm 104:4 who makest the winds thy messengers, fire and flame thy ministers.

The subservient role of angels is described as is their position; they are spirits who serve God (Heb. 1:14). In Heb. 1:7, there is a movement from their subservient role to their changeableness. In the two quotations that follow, the stress lies on the eternality of the Son, contrasted with the variableness of angelic nature. In Rabbinic tradition, angels were supposed to live only as long as they ministered in some capacity. In the context of Hebrews 1, there is an implied contrast between the changeability and transitory nature of wind and fire (angels) and the unchangeableness of the Son, "You are always the same and your life never ends" (1:12).

ὁ θρόνος σου ὁ θεὸς εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα τοῦ αἰῶνος,
καὶ ἡ ῥάβδος τῆς εὐθύτητος ῥάβδος τῆς βασιλείας σου.
9 ἠγάπησας δικαιοσύνην καὶ ἐμίσησας ἀνομίαν·
διὰ τοῦτο ἔχρισεν σε ὁ θεὸς
ὁ θεός σου
ἔλαιον ἀγαλλιάσεως παρὰ τοὺς μετόχους σου.

Hebrews Text	OT Reference	OT Context & Form	OT Meaning	Application in Hebrews
1:8-9	Psa. 45:6-7	Royal wedding psalm	Permanence of rule, anointing and celebration by his peers (fellows)	Affirmation of deity, Messianic anointing and celebration by angels (fellows)

Psalm 45 is a royal wedding psalm in which the Hebrew poet addresses the bridegroom (vss. 1-9) and the bride (vss. 10-17), presumably upon the day of their wedding. The wedding benediction affirms the royal stature of the king and the celebrated devotion of his new bride. The language is exalted, so much so that it bursts the bounds of human language, e.g., "God has blessed you forever" (v. 2), "Your divine throne endures for ever and ever" (v. 6). Originally, the song held in view an Israelite king, but the words, which are addressed to him are so wonderful that their vital fulfillment can only lie in the Messianic King, the one who is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:3). The oracle to the king in Psa. 45:6 about an enduring kingship extends in 45:17 to his posterity, "I will cause your name to be celebrated in all generations; therefore the peoples will praise you forever." A clue for the reinterpretation of the passage can be found in the contrast between the changeableness and variableness of the angels, contrasted with the kingdom that will last forever and be characterized by justice; this thought is certainly present in Psa. 45. Though a Hebrew monarch is addressed in Psa. 45:6-7, "Your divine throne," or "Your throne O God" or "Your throne is a throne of God," the writer of Hebrews interprets these words addressed to the Son as God. Further, the "fellows" of the Israelite king in Psa. 45:7 may well be other kings or subjects of his kingdom who congratulate him on his wedding day. In the text of Heb. 1:9, the "fellows" who celebrate the Son as God may well be the angels who join in with the festive celebration. The text affirms the deity of the Son, the permanence of the kingdom and prefigures the royal messianic feast, which will be celebrated by angels and the "many sons [and daughters] who will be brought into glory" (Heb. 2:10, 13).

Heb. 1:10 And,

**“Thou, Lord, didst found the earth in the beginning,
and the heavens are the work of thy hands;11 they will perish, but thou remainest;
they will all grow old like a garment,12 like a mantle thou wilt roll them up,
and they will be changed.**

**But thou art the same,
and thy years will never end.”**

10 καί·

σὺ κατ' ἀρχάς, κύριε, τὴν γῆν

ἐθεμελίωσας,

καὶ ἔργα τῶν χειρῶν σου εἰσιν οἱ

οὐρανοί·

11 αὐτοὶ ἀπολοῦνται, σὺ δὲ διαμένεις,

καὶ πάντες ὡς ἱμάτιον παλαιωθήσονται,

12 καὶ ὡσεὶ περιβόλαιον ἐλίξεις αὐτούς,

ὡς ἱμάτιον καὶ ἀλλαγῆσονται·

σὺ δὲ ὁ αὐτὸς εἶ

καὶ τὰ ἔτη σου οὐκ ἐκλείψουσιν.

Hebrews Text	OT Reference	OT Context & Form	OT Meaning	Application in Hebrews
1:10-12	Psa. 102:25-27	Individual complaint psalm	Unchangeable creator God over against changing creation	Eternality of Son over against changing creation

Psalm 102 is classified as an individual psalm of complaint wherein the poet levies his complaint about his depressed condition and prays for the Lord's deliverance from his various troubles, e.g., "For my days pass away like smoke, and my bones burn like a furnace. My heart is smitten like grass, and withered; I forget to eat my bread . . . I am like a vulture of the wilderness, like an owl of the waste places" (Psa. 102:3, 4, 6). The poet is especially troubled about the shortness of his life and perhaps a premature death (vss. 11, 23, 24). In the midst of his anguished uncertainty about his life, the poet affirms that the Lord is the only one who provides security and permanence in the midst of his uncertainty and instability. The poet looks to creation wherein the Lord formed the earth and the heavens, which are the work of His hands. As he views the universe, the poet also realizes that the whole of the universe, which itself appears to be solid and secure, will undergo a cataclysmic change; the time is coming when the Lord will fold up the heavens and the earth like a costly robe and they will be changed like clothes upon a person. In contrast to the uncertain transience of the world, the poet affirms the eternity of the Lord, "You are always the same and your life never ends" (Psa. 45:27). The writer of Hebrews transposes the eternity of Yahweh to the eternity of the Son, thereby reaffirming the deity of the Son, the agency of the Son in creation and sustaining the universe. Later in the epistle, the writer will affirm that "Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and tomorrow" (13:8).

**Heb.1:13 But to what angel has he ever said,
 "Sit at my right hand,
 till I make thy enemies
 a stool for thy feet"?**

13 πρὸς τίνα δὲ τῶν ἀγγέλων εἶρηκεν ποτε·
 κάθου ἐκ δεξιῶν μου,
 ἕως ἂν θῶ τοὺς ἐχθρούς σου ὑποπόδιον
 τῶν ποδῶν σου

Hebrews Text	OT Reference	OT Context & Form	OT Meaning	Application in Hebrews
1:13	Psa. 110:1	Enthronement and Messianic psalm	Promise of a victorious Messianic king	Ascension of Christ with honor and authority

The final quote of this chapter comes from Psa. 110, a psalm that expresses Jewish Messianic expectation. Judaism understood the psalm to refer to the Messiah, whom it recognized as the "lord" by David:

Psa. 110:1 Thus said to my lord [i.e., David's Messiah]

'Sit at my right hand,
 till I make your enemies your footstool.'

In the Gospel tradition, Jesus makes use of the Jewish interpretation, wherein David calls the Messiah his lord, to make his point; the Messiah must be something more than merely "the son of David," since he calls him "lord" (Matt. 22:41ff.). In Matt. 26:64, Jesus links "sitting at the right hand of God" with the divine status and authority of the Son of Man. Originally, the psalm was a royal psalm, perhaps used at the time or the king's enthronement when he was invested as the vice-regent of God. Closely related to the

affirmation of kingship is the promise, guaranteed by an intractable oath¹⁷ that the king is also installed as a priest after the order of Melchizedek. Weiser notes, "In that union of throne and altar the poet discerns God's will for his people."¹⁸ The link with Melchizedek is later used by the writer of Hebrews in an extended treatment (5:6-10; 7:1-28). The idea of the session of the Son at the right hand of the Father is spread throughout the NT.¹⁹ From the rhetorical question, "To what angel has he ever said?" it is clear that such exalted language can only be used for the Son, not for an angel. While they are busy accomplishing their various services, the Son alone sits in triumph over His vanquished enemies, in the position of honor and authority.

Heb. 1:14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to serve, for the sake of those who are to obtain salvation?

14 οὐχὶ πάντες εἰσὶν λειτουργικὰ πνεύματα εἰς διακονίαν ἀποστελλόμενα διὰ τοὺς μέλλοντας κληρονομεῖν σωτηρίαν

The final rhetorical question of the chapter, "Are they not all ministering spirits..." expects the positive answer, "Yes, they are ministering spirits." Whatever may be their status and function, they are all united in their common ministry, having been sent from the same source, for the sake of people who are about to inherit salvation. Salvation, similar to eternal life and the Kingdom of God is both a present reality and future hope.²⁰ God's primary concern is not with angels but with the people of God and accordingly sends them to bring help to those who are recipients of salvation

Why are there so many references to angels? T. W. Manson suggests that there is a certain correlation of the argument of the book of Hebrews and the heresy in Colossae, where angels were presumably worshipped.

Col. 2:18 Let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels, taking his stand on visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind,

Col.2:15 He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him.

The doctrine of angelology was widespread and it grew to terrific proportions in the inter-testamental period. Enoch notes: "And after that I saw thousands of thousands and ten thousand times ten thousand, I saw a multitude beyond number and reckoning, who stood before the Lord of Spirits" (Enoch. 40:1). In 4 Esdras 8:21, there were millions and millions of angels, some nameless, some anonymous and others with names (Raphael, Uriel, Phanuel, Gabriel, Michael). There were 200 angels who controlled the movements of the stars and kept them in their courses. There were angels of the rain, dew, sea, frost, lightning, destroying angels and angels of punishment and guardian angels. With such a vast angelology, there was the very real danger that the angels would come to intervene

¹⁷ See also Amos 4:2; 6:8; 1:3ff.

¹⁸ Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: Old Testament Library*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), p. 695.

¹⁹ I Cor. 15:25ff.; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; I Pet. 3:22; Heb. 8:1; 10:12.

²⁰ In the book of Hebrews, "salvation" is based on the finished work of Christ, the real grounds for salvation (cf. 2:10; 5:9); σωτηρία--"if we neglect so great a salvation" (2:3); "make the author of their salvation perfect" (2:10); "the author of eternal salvation" (5:9); "and things that accompany salvation" (6:9); "second time without sin unto salvation" (9:29); σώζω—"unto him that was able to save him" (5:7); "able also to save them to the uttermost" (7:25).

between God and humans. The doctrine of angels may be fine but it has a real danger. The doctrine positions a series of beings between God and humans, beings through which people may feel that they make their approach to God. In Jesus Christ, God has definitively spoken; the writer of the book of Hebrews makes us aware that the way is utterly open for people to make their direct approach to God through the new and living way. The role of angels vis-à-vis humans is reversed; humans are not to make use of angels as intermediaries, rather the angels exist for the service of humans. This is why Paul counters the gnostic "devotion and self-abasement" before angels (Col. 2:23).

The initial contrast of the prologue makes it clear that God has completely and definitively spoken in His Son. Because He is the Son, He is infinitely superior to the angels. The OT quotes speak of Kingship, an eternal kingdom, worship of the Son, the unchangeable character of the Son, deity of the Son, the eternality of the Son, the creative agency of the Son, the sustaining providence of the Son, the atonement of the Son, and the present rule of Christ. God has spoken "once-for-all" in His Son. In so many ways, the writer points to the greatness of the Son who has revealed God to humanity. The stress lies on the superiority of the Son through whom God has so definitively spoken. We can also sense the vital connection of Jesus with His people in 1:14 in that He is bound to them who would "*inherit* salvation" since He is the *heir* of all things.

Application

Just as the writer with ink and scroll writes of the superiority of Christ, so we as the people of God, need to be fully alive in our full and appropriate worship of the Son. And our worship needs to be broad, expansive and deep; the expression of praise that comes from our hearts needs to reflect the greatness of Jesus' person, the completeness of His work. What should worship be but an expression from our hearts to the person of His Son? Our words are to correspond to His person. We express to God His greatness.

Why is it that we need to become skilled in worship? Let me draw an analogy. Let's suppose that a person who knows nothing about music walks into a concert with the Philadelphia Philharmonic and comes out of the concert with the words, "What a bore." The question I have is this, "Is this person really making a statement about the music or about himself?" When we begin to reflect upon the immeasurable greatness of the Lord and contemplate the utter finality of God's revelation in Him, our perspective changes, as we begin to appreciate Him for who He is. And in appreciating Him for who He is we are shaped by the Person who summons our worship. And we become skilled in articulating praise and worship to Him as the response of our hearts corresponds to His true nature.