

**International Sunday School Lesson
Study Notes
October 2, 2016**

**Lesson Text: Hebrews 1:1-9
Lesson Title: The Express Image of God**

Introduction

The Book of Hebrews is recorded in Scripture with no mention of a human author. It could have been Apollos, Barnabas, Silas, Paul or some unknown writer. It was probably written before the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., since it refers to the Mosaic sacrificial system as still in practice. What we do not know about the book of Hebrews is not nearly as significant as what the content of the book itself makes clear. The book of Hebrews contents reveal Jesus Christ, God's Son, is superior to everyone and everything.

Hebrews was written to some early Christians from Jewish backgrounds who were struggling in the faith. All of us struggle from time to time and for that reason this book is practical and needful even today. Time and time again, the author of Hebrews takes us back to Jesus. Remember, the Christians, to whom this book was written, were struggling with hanging on to the Old Testament forms of religion. All they had previously known was the thousand-year old ceremonial law of Moses passed from generation to generation. They were also struggling with mixing their thinking and tradition with the Mediterranean world of their day.

Leaving behind their old tradition and moving from Judaism to Christianity had left them unsatisfied and questioning. Because of their dissatisfaction some were tempted to return to the old forms of religion. That old form included prophets and angels. Prophets and angels were a vital part of God's economy, but none of them had Jesus' credentials. The Hebrew author wanted his readers to know then and now, Jesus Christ is "The Express Image of God."

Christ is Superior to Old Testament Prophets (Hebrews 1:1-2)

Verse 1

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

"God" has always had spokesmen ready to speak for Him. "In time past," God spoke "at sundry times and in divers manners." "Sundry times" means God communicated over different periods of time. "Divers manners" means "in different ways." Sometimes God spoke through visions, parables, dreams, types and shadows. Sometimes he spoke through law, prophecy, warnings and even

poetry.

“Unto the fathers” primarily refers to the Jewish ancestors, but God also spoke to Gentiles which in truth means He spoke to us. “By the prophets” was God’s typical way of communicating to His people as a whole. God’s usual way of speaking to man was to call a prophet, give him a message, then inspire the prophet to speak or write to the people.

Verse 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 last days” refers to the period of time from Christ’s birth until He returns the second time. “Spoken unto us by his Son” is reason to rejoice and worship God’s Son! God’s greatest spokesman was neither a prophet nor an angel. His greatest spokesman is God’s Son. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, Micah and many others were great men with great messages. But when God wanted to reveal Himself fully, He spoke “by his Son” (Hebrews 1:2).

Some people in Jesus’ day thought he was just a prophet (John 9:17). He was not just a prophet. God said, “Whom he hath appointed heir of all things...” The Lord Jesus Christ as God’s Son, has an inherited claim to all things. God had other “heirs.” Abraham was heir to everything in Canaan. Yet he was buried in a cave which was never deeded to him (Genesis 23:9). Likewise, Jesus lived in this world as a stranger, “heir of all things,” yet never received it. But now, praise the Lord, He died, and rose again and is “heir of all things.”

“By whom also he made the worlds” speaks of Jesus as Creator. God created all things through Jesus Christ (John 1:1-3; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:16; Revelation 4:11). There are many people making numerous statements about this world today and what needs to happen in it. But, here is the question... if someone has something to say about this world, the sin in it, and the salvation needed, who should you listen too? The answer is Jesus Christ, God’s Son! He created it. He owns it. It belongs to Him. So, listen to Him.

Illus. Doctor John Phillips in his commentary on Hebrews says, “If you will not listen to Christ, God has nothing to say to you.”

Verse 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;”

Christ is “the brightness” of God’s “glory.” The word “brightness” means “radiance.” “Glory” is all God is. Jesus is not just a mirror-like image of God the Father. He literally and actually manifested the “glory” of God the Father which would have been impossible had Jesus Christ not been God in the flesh (John 14:8-9).

“Express image of his person” means Jesus is the exact representation of God’s nature. “Express image” refers to something engraved or impressed. The word was used in biblical days to speak of impressing something with a mark, a seal, or a letter. A coin bears all the intricate line engravings of the instrument used to make it. The Hebrew writer is telling his Jewish audience and us that Jesus Christ is line for line, mark for mark, the image of deity! God’s deity has been reproduced in Christ’s humanity. Jesus Christ is God in focus!

“Upholding all things by the word of his power” means Christ is the sustainer of all things. “Uphold” means “to bear or carry along” like a ship is moved by the wind. Through the creative and sustaining power of Jesus Christ all things are here and held together. The oceans and seas stay within their borders because Jesus Christ “holds” them there. The mountains and the valleys remain where they are because of Christ’s “upholding power” (Psalm 65:6).

Christ’s sustaining power comes from “the word.” “Word” is the Greek word *rhema* {ree-mah}. It means “to speak, say, or utter.” God spoke and it was created. God speaks and it remains.

“When he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Did you notice the contrast: His glory, His person, His power, and “OUR SINS?” “Our sins” required His redemption. Christ “purged our sins.” The word “purged” means “purified or cleansed us from sin.”

The Jewish people reading these words were familiar with purification from sin. They were familiar with the Day of Atonement and other offerings and sacrifices which removed the guilt of sin. The Hebrew author wanted his readers to know Christ alone can purify sins, something all the Old Testament sacrifices combined could never accomplish (Hebrews 10:4). Christ accomplished this “by himself.” “By himself” means “alone.” Since Jesus was the only sacrifice God would accept, He offered Himself.

Christ is Superior to Angels (Hebrews 1:4-8)

Verse 4

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

Man is a wonderful and amazing creation. Man is higher than the planets, animals and material creation. But above fallen man there is another created group which ranks higher. This group is the angels.

The word “angel” means “messenger.” Angels are spirit beings and although they do have some form of a body they do not have flesh or bones (1 Corinthians 15:40). Angels were all created at the same time and are capable of appearing in human body form (Matthew 28:3-4; Hebrews 13:2). Angels cannot procreate (Colossians 1:16-17). They do not increase, decrease, or die. Angels can speak, worship, serve, and move with incredible speed (Galatians 1:8; Daniel 9:21).

There are 108 references to angels in the Old Testament and 165 references in the New Testament (Revelation 5:11). They ministered to Christ and they minister to believers today. Angels desire to know about the salvation believers possess (1 Peter 1:12). How was Jesus “better than the angels?”

“Being made so much better than the angels” refers to the fact Jesus Christ for a while was made “*a little lower than the angels*” in rank or status (Hebrews 2:9). This occurred when Jesus took upon Himself the form of human flesh. “Better” means “superior.” Jesus became superior to the angels when “by inheritance” he “obtained a more excellent name.” “Inheritance” is something someone gives you. God gave Jesus “a more excellent name” than the angels.

Angels have names. We do not call them number 401, or number 232. They have names such as Lucifer, the “shining one.” Other names recorded are Michael and Gabriel. The author is saying Jesus' name is far superior to their names. Not just the word, Jesus, but the character of the person who bore the name. By inheritance from God Christ obtained a more excellent name than anyone else.

Verse 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?”

“Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee...” is a quotation of Psalm 2:7. God never spoke to any “of the angels” and called them His “Son.” Not only does Jesus have a superior relationship to the Father by virtue of His name; He has a superior relationship to the Father by virtue of His position. He is the “Son” of God. Job 38:7 says, “*When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?*” When God called angels “*the sons of God*” in Job 38:7, it was more of a generic designation than an intimate relationship.

“Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee” does not mean Christ was a created being. Jesus Christ is God and has always existed. Commenting on the words, “this day have I begotten thee,” Doctor Warren W. Wiersbe writes, “Paul pinpointed the time of this ‘begetting,’ the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 13:33). From eternity, Jesus Christ was God the Son. He humbled Himself and became Man (Philippians 2:5-6). In His resurrection, however, He glorified that humanity received from the Father and received back the eternal glory He had veiled (John 17:1, 5). The Resurrection declares: ‘Jesus is God's Son!’” (Romans 1:4). (*Bible Exposition Commentary (BE Series) - New Testament, The Bible Exposition Commentary, New Testament, Volume 2.*)

“I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to be a Son” is a quotation of 2 Samuel 7:14. The immediate application in 2 Samuel 7:14 is David’s experience of being Solomon’s son, whom God would love and disciplined as a son (Psalm 89:27). But the ultimate application and fulfillment is Jesus Christ, the “*greater than Solomon*” (Matthew 12:42).

Verse 6

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

“And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world” is a reference to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. This is when the kingly recognition of Christ will take place resulting in open worship by the angels. The Hebrew writer identifies Christ as the “firstbegotten.”

The word “firstbegotten” is the Greek word *prototokos* {pro-tot-ok-os} meaning “firstborn.” However, the word “firstbegotten” does not always mean one born first. God made Solomon the “firstbegotten” or first born even though Solomon is listed tenth in the official genealogy (1 Chronicles 3:1-5; Psalm 89:27).

Commenting on this special word “firstbegotten,” Doctor Woodrow Kroll writes, “Every time you come to this word, *prototokos*, the word ‘firstborn,’ it's modified somehow. For example, Revelation 1:5, ‘firstborn of the dead.’ Again, Colossians 1:15, ‘firstborn of creation.’ All these words show us that ‘firstborn’ does not mean the first thing created. He is not the first brother or the first sister. He is not the first of creation. He is the head of all these things. The firstborn of all the brothers and sisters was, in fact, the heir to everything for the father, so His heirship is not showing His birth, per se; it is showing His position as one over the rest. And I think the word ‘firstborn’ here clearly indicates position as opposed to birth.” (*Sermon Quote: Hebrews, Our Superior Savior, 2008, Back to the Bible Broadcast*).

Verse 7

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

This verse is a quotation of Psalm 104:4, “*Who maketh his angels spirits; his ministers a flaming fire...*” Notice the word “maketh” used here and “maketh” in Psalm 104:4. The Hebrew writer is making a point to his readers that angels are “made” or created by God in contrast to Christ who had no creation. Angels are created “spirits” or beings made to “minister” or serve God in carrying out His will. Just as wind and fire are used to serve God and men, angels are used to serve God. But this is not true with Christ. God calls the “angels,” “spirits.” They are not called God’s “Son.”

Verse 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.”

Quoting from Psalm 45:6-7, the Hebrew author is again magnifying the deity of Christ over angels. The deity of Christ is presented here as being from the lips of God Himself in the words “But unto the Son he saith.” This is God the Father talking to God the Son. God the Father addresses God the Son as “O God” and talks about the Son’s “throne!” These Jewish believers knew angels ministered around the throne of God; they do not sit on the throne of God. God’s Son has a “throne” that is “for ever and ever.” If anyone denies Jesus Christ is God they are contradicting God Himself.

Christ also has “a sceptre of righteousness.” A “sceptre of righteousness” is another sign of Christ’s royal kingship and His power to rule in His kingdom. Christ’s power and rule is one of “righteousness.” God’s Son is a ruler of integrity. Many men have promised to rule nations and kingdoms righteously only to be marred by corruption and deceit. Not so with Christ. He is a “righteous” ruler.

Christ is Superior to His Fellows (Hebrews 1:9)

Verse 9

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

Still speaking to Christ, God says, “Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity.” God is saying His Son, Jesus Christ, loves “righteousness and hates iniquity.” Christ delights in integrity, virtue and uprightness. He “hates iniquity” means Christ despises lawlessness. Here again, Christ is superior to the angels. Some of God’s created angels chose to love righteousness and hate

iniquity. Lucifer, one of the originally created angels, chose to hate righteousness and love iniquity. He led an angelic rebellion against God and was cast out of heaven.

Because Christ “loved righteousness and hated iniquity,” God “anointed” him “with the oil of gladness.” God’s anointing signifies recognition and approval by God for the ministry one was called to perform. Moses anointed Aaron; Samuel anointed David; Elijah anointed Elisha. God’s Son, Jesus Christ has been “anointed” by God. There is no greater anointing than that.

The word “gladness” means joyful or happy. It can also be used to describe one leaping or dancing. If this “oil of gladness” is the same as the “oil” mentioned in Isaiah 61:3, it means God anointed Jesus in greater measure than He did other men. The Isaiah 61:3 passage refers to anointing those in Zion who had previously mourned.

God told His Son his “anointing” was “above thy fellows.” The word “fellows” refers to Christ’s partners or companions. In this context, it most likely refers to the men who were “anointed” for specific offices in the Old Testament such as prophets, priests, and kings. Think about how glad and happy David was as King of Israel. He was one of God’s anointed men and wrote such jubilant and happy psalms. Yet, God’s Son has been “anointed with gladness” above men like David.

Conclusion

We live in a very pluralistic age when people say one god is as good as the next. When the Hebrew author said, “God hath spoken unto us by his Son,” that truth refutes the Muslim teaching which says Jesus Christ was a prophet revealed by God, but the greatest revelation from God was through the prophet Mohammed. When the Hebrew author said, “By whom also he made the worlds,” that truth refutes Charles T. Russell’s heresy (Jehovah Witnesses) that Jesus Christ was God’s first created being.

Jesus Christ does not just reveal God, He is essentially identical; that is, His nature is the same as God. There is an exact correspondence between God the Father and God the Son. He is the very image of God’s substance, the “express image of his person. This truth is stressed in other texts in the New Testament. In Colossians 1:15, Paul says, *“Who is the image of the invisible God.”* Paul continues in Colossians 1:16-17, *“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.”*

As stated in the introduction, the author of Hebrews is responding to the doubts and struggles of some early Jewish Christians. If you are struggling, consider Jesus. If you are doubting, look to Jesus. If you are dissatisfied and questioning Christianity and the Gospel, think about Jesus.

Amen.