

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Website: [www.churchredeemeraz.org](http://www.churchredeemeraz.org)

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Gary L. W. Johnson

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### **CHRIST PREEMINENT TO THE ANGELS; WHO DO PEOPLE SAY THAT THE SON OF MAN IS? (MATT. 16:13)**

Angels are everywhere. There are movies about them. There are television programs devoted to them. *Time* and *Life* have cover stories about angels and there are books galore on the subject. Simply type in the word *Angel* in Google search, and entry after entry pops up. One very popular site, Beliefnet.com has daily readings from your personal guardian angel! Or how about a visit from the guardian Angel of your beloved dead pet! This website does not advertise itself as being distinctively Christian, rather they are “a multi-faith e-community designed to help you meet your own religious and spiritual needs – in an interesting, captivating and engaging way. We are independent and are not affiliated with a particular religion or spiritual movement.” Christians, however, should not conclude that the present public fascination with angels is necessarily a good thing in and of itself. The so-called New Age movement, with its decidedly pagan origins, is obsessed with angels. Mormonism, as most of you know, got its start with a message from the angel Moroni. The Scriptures warn us that our arch-foe Satan masquerades as an “angel of light” (2 Corinthians 11:14). The Bible does have a lot to say about angels. We know, for instance, that there are a lot of them (Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 5:11). We discover that they are created beings (Psalm 148:2-5; Colossians 1:16). Some of their number fell from their original state of holiness (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). Angels are described as spirits (Hebrews 1:4), although when they appear, they do so in bodily form (Luke 24:4; Matthew 28:2-5). Sometimes their appearance is not accompanied with visual splendors (Hebrews 13:2). Angels are not all-knowing (Matthew 24:36; 1 Peter 1:12) or all-powerful (Psalm 103:20; 2 Peter 2:11), and they are not glorified human beings (1 Corinthians 6:3; Hebrews 1:14). They do a number of things. They constantly serve and worship God (Matthew 18:10; Hebrews 1:6). They minister to and protect God’s people (Hebrews 1:14; Genesis 19:11; Psalm 91:11; Daniel 3:28; 6:22; Acts 5:19; 27:23), and they have a role in God’s judgment (2 Thessalonians 1:7; Revelation 15-16). When we turn our attention to the life of Christ, we discover that angels were involved in foretelling His birth to Joseph and Mary (Matthew 1:20-24; Luke 1:26-38), announcing His advent to the shepherds (Luke 2:8-14), and ministering to Him after His confrontation with Satan in the wilderness (Matthew 4:11). An angel ministered to Jesus in Gethsemane (Luke 22:43). They were in attendance at the Ascension (Acts 1:9-11) and they will accompany Him at the Second Coming (2 Thessalonians 1:7). However, as our passage shows, people can give too great a priority to angelic beings. The author, having stated that God has given a new and final revelation (1:1-3), now sets out to develop this by a series of contrasts, the first being that of the Son and the angels. The underlying emphasis is on the *NATURE* of the Son and the nature of the angels. It is on this point that many make the grave mistake of *not* distinguishing between the *ESSENTIAL BEING* (the Eternal Son, the second person of the Godhead) and the

**MEDIATORIAL CHARACTER** (the incarnate Son as Mediator) of Christ. Because of this, many suppose Christ to have been less than God and use such texts as Jn. 14:28 to support this view. But if Christ was not God, then His work is of no value whatsoever (cf. Ps. 49:7). What you think of Christ, then, determines what you think of what He did. It is to this that the writer of the Hebrews focuses his attention.

#### QUESTIONS:

- 1). Why the comparison between Christ and angels? The situation demanded it. The Hebrews were tempted to lapse into the error of placing the angels over and above Christ because the role they played in the giving of the Law (Heb. 2:2 and Acts 7:53). In Paul's epistle to the Colossians a similar fascination with angels troubled the church (Col. 2:18).
- 2). What are the grounds the author uses to support the superiority of Christ over the angels? The Old Testament scriptures; it is from the Old Testament that the author goes to prove his case for the Sonship and sovereignty of Christ.

#### I. Christ and the Angels

##### A. Their names (v.4)

**NOTE:** "In scripture, names were generally descriptive of the person, of his position, of some circumstance affecting him, hope entertained concerning him, etc., so that the 'name' often came to stand for the person."<sup>1</sup> (cf. Matt. 1:21; Mk. 3:17)

1. Christ is "the Son" (vv. 2, 5, 8).
2. Angels are "ministering spirits" (v. 14). The Son has "inherited a more excellent name" than the angels. This is to be understood in light of v. 3, as Westcott has said, "The essential Nature of the Son is contrasted with the consequences of the Incarnation in regard to His divine human Person (comp. c.v. 9). His assumption of humanity, which for a time "made Him lower than angels", issued in His royal exaltation (cf. Matt. 26:64; Lk. 22:69)."<sup>2</sup>

**NOTE:** It can be seen from Scripture that Jesus never considered Himself simply and only a mere human being, nor did He consider Himself an angelic being (cf. Mk. 13:31). He is the Creator, not a creature.

##### B. Their constitutions and positions (vv. 5-14)

**NOTE:** Beginning with verse 5 and running through verse 13, the author summons seven Old Testament citations to prove his point.

1. Ps. 2:7
  - a. Christ is "My Son."

**NOTE:** "The authoritative attestation of Jesus," comments Hughes, "as the divine Son applies to the earthly sojourn of the incarnate Son in its entirety and at every moment of that entirety."<sup>3</sup>

- 1). His conception – "The Son of the Most High" (Lk. 1:32)
- 2). His baptism – "Thou art my Son" (Mk. 1:11)
- 3). His transfiguration – "This is My Son" (Lk. 9:35; Mt. 17:5)
- 4). His resurrection – "designated the Son of God in power" (Rom. 1:4)

##### b. Christ was "begotten"

**NOTE:** At what point do we locate "today" and when did this "begetting" take place?

- 1). "Today" refers to His Resurrection (cf. Col 1:18; Rev. 1:5; Acts 13:32), ascension, and glorification.
- 2). "begetting" is that of the *INCARNATE* Son, *not* His Eternal generation, as the second person of the Trinity. It stresses His finished work in redeeming those the Father gave Him.

#### 2. II Sam. 7:14

- a. Christ is the Son of the Father – fulfillment of the Davidic promise in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, the purpose of which was redemption, something no *created* being angelic or otherwise, could accomplish. v. 6 – "FIRSTBORN" – Re-emphasis on Christ's incarnation as stated in v. 5, the title also has connection with the title "Heir", as

Warfield has written, "First born and 'Heir'" are little more than specially honorific ways of saying 'Son'. God's 'Firstborn' as such takes rank above all other existing beings; even all of the angels shall do Him reverence. God's 'First born' is also naturally God's 'Heir', an heir whose inheritance embraces the universe, and whose tenure stretches to eternity."<sup>4</sup>

3. Deut. 32:43

a. Christ is worshipped by the angels.

**NOTE:** "It should be noticed that in Deut. 32:43 the pronoun 'him' refers to the Lord God (YAHWEH); there is no mention of any other person to whom worship is to be given. But when transferred to our present context the one ('him') whom God's angels are to worship is clearly the firstborn Son."<sup>5</sup>

4. Ps. 104:4

a. Christ is served by the angels. The purpose for quoting this verse was to show that the angels are *servants*, as illustrated by wind and fire. The servants are subject to the authority of the Son; this is brought out fully in v. 8.

5. Ps. 45:6-8

a. Christ rules the angels. The throne referred to is the throne of David, which Christ, the physical descendant through Mary, is to reign upon as Messiah; but He is called "O God" (ELOHIM), and elsewhere "Mighty God" (Isa. 9:6), and "The Lord (YAHWEH) is our righteousness" (Jer. 23:5). His rule is one of justice and righteousness. The King is said to "love righteousness and hate lawlessness." As Pink has written, "Where there is true love for God, there is also abhorrence of sin."<sup>6</sup>

b. Christ the anointed

**NOTE:** The Greek word "Christ" and the Hebrew word "Messiah" mean anointed.

1). The anointer: "Thy God" speaks of the Father anointing the *INCARNATE* Christ. (cf. Jn. 20:17)

2). The anointment: "oil of gladness" – as Hughes again says this refers "to the triumphant entry of Jesus into the Heavenly glory...redemption for mankind and the world is the cause of gladness and rejoicing in the presence of God."<sup>7</sup>

6. Ps. 102:25-27

a. Christ the eternal creator. The Son is again addressed as YAHWEH (cf. v. 6). The Son is creator, the angels creatures; The Son is infinite, eternal, the angels finite, dependent.

7. Ps. 110:1

**NOTE:** This Psalm is cited at least 12 times in the book of Hebrews.

a. The final contrast; the Son sits enthroned, the angels are servants to those whom the Son has redeemed (v. 14).

**CONCLUSION:** Like so many people today, the Hebrews were infatuated with angels – especially since they were instrumental in the giving of the Law. Here is a prime example of misreading the text of the Scripture. The role of the angels in the giving of the Law does NOT mean that the Law (or the angels) suddenly becomes the means by which we gain our acceptance with God – on the contrary, it *only* serves to highlight our sinfulness! In his sermon *Constraining Love* (2 Cor. 5:14-15), J. Gresham Machen set out a dialogue between the Law of God and the sinner who has died with Christ in the Savior's death on the cross. It has enormous spiritual value for the believer. Machen wrote: We may imagine a dialogue between the law of God and a sinful man. "Man," says the law of God, "have you obeyed my commands?" "No," says the sinner, "I have transgressed them in thought, word, and deed." "Well, then, sinner," says the law, "have you paid the penalty which I have pronounced upon those who have disobeyed? Have you died in the sense that I meant when I said, 'The soul that sins it shall die'?" "Yes," says the sinner, "I have died. That penalty that you pronounced upon my sin has been paid." "What do you mean," says the law, "by saying that you have died?"

You do not look as though you had died. You look as though you were very much alive.” “Yes,” says the sinner, “I have died. I died there on the cross outside the walls of Jerusalem; for Jesus died there as my representative and my substitute. I died there, so far as the penalty of the law was concerned.” “You say Christ is your representative and substitute,” says the law. “Then I have indeed no further claim of penalty against you. The curse which I pronounced against your sin has indeed been fulfilled. My threatenings are very terrible, but I have nothing to say against those for whom Christ died.” That, my friends, is what Paul means by the tremendous “therefore,” when he says: “One died for all, *therefore* all died.” On that “therefore” hangs all our hope for time and for eternity.<sup>8</sup>

### ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, IV (Eerdmans, 1939) p. 2112.

<sup>2</sup> B.F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Eerdmans, 1974) p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, (Eerdmans, 1977) p. 53

<sup>4</sup> .B. Warfield, *The Lord of Glory* (Baker, 1974), p. 281.

<sup>5</sup> Hughes, p. 60

<sup>6</sup> A.W. Pink, *Exposition of Hebrews* (Baker, 1954) p. 62.

<sup>7</sup> Hughes, p. 66.

<sup>8</sup> J. Gresham Machen, *God Transcendent and Other Sermons* (Eerdmans, 1949) p. 133. This may be found online. <http://feedingonchrist.com/a-dialogue-to-die-for/>