

JESUS IS BETTER

Hebrews 1 || *Better than Angels*

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Context

Hebrews is a letter that was written sometime in the AD 60's – which means that the global church is only about 30 years old. Although many of the Jews (also called Israelites or Hebrews) had converted from Judaism to Christianity, life wasn't easy for them. In fact, we read in **Hebrews 10** that they had endured all kinds of hardships for their faith in the Messiah, Jesus Christ.¹

While it was okay for orthodox Jews to practice their religion, Christianity was an “*illegal superstition*”. If these persecuted Hebrews wanted to avoid suffering, tribulation, chains, and the plundering of their goods, the only thing they needed to do was to walk away from Jesus. If they would just let go of their faith in Jesus, they could enjoy an uninterrupted life of peace and quiet. And this is exactly what some of them seemed to be doing. They were “*forsaking the church*” (10:25), “*casting away their confidence*” (10:35), and “*drifting*” (2:1) back into the safety and familiarity of their old religion.

So, the author of this letter writes to the Hebrew Christians to exhort and encourage them to keep from “*departing from the living God*” (3:12).² His main argument throughout this book is that Jesus is better: **Jesus is better** than everything you have left behind in Judaism, and **He is worth** whatever hardship you will face in the future.

- His ways are better than your religious traditions.
- His laws are better than the laws of Moses.
- His word is better than the word of prophets.
- His sacrifice is better than the sacrifice performed by the priests.
- The hope He offers is better than the hope in the Old Testament.

Jesus is better...

- Better than health, safety, or comfort.
- Better than power or wealth or prestige or your reputation.
- His joy is better. His promises are better. His reward is better.

Your entire life could be one of hardship and sacrifice and pain and tears and struggle and disappointment, and the message of this book is that Jesus is worth it. Living for Jesus is better than any situation or possession or relationship you could ever dream of.

You can point to anything – in any direction – at every moment – and say, “Jesus is better.” That's the theme of this book.

Chapter One: Jesus is better than angels.

¹ Heb 10:32–34

² See also 2:1; 6:4–6; 10:29; 12:15–24.

Q. Why start this letter by comparing Jesus to angels?

A. It seems that there were Christian communities that were elevating angels in their theology and in their worship services.³ This is clear by how much time the writer of Hebrews deals with this issue.⁴

It's not surprising that some of these early Christians might have been tempted to elevate angels in their worship. After all, in the very last chapter of the Bible we see the apostle John falling down at the feet of an angel to worship him (**Rev 22:8**). The angel quickly corrects this impulse and reminds John that the only person we are to worship is God (**22:9**).

Q. Why would Christians ever be tempted to worship angels? **A.** Because angels are amazing creatures.

“Their appearance was like burning coals of fire, like the appearance of torches going back and forth among the living creatures. The fire was bright, and out of the fire went lightning.”⁵

~ *Ezekiel 1:13*

- **David** was paralyzed with fear before the presence of the angel (**1 Chr. 21:30**).
- **Daniel** trembled on his knees (**Dan 10:10–17**).
- **Gideon** felt it that it was the most awesome creature he had ever seen (**Judges 6:22**).
- **Mary** was troubled (*greatly moved*) when the angel appeared to her (**Luke 1:29**).
- **The shepherds** were greatly afraid (**Luke 2:9**).
- **John** felt compelled to worship the angel (**Rev 22:8–9**).

If this seems like an odd response to you, it might be because our culture has a very warped (or at least a very watered down) idea of angels...

- *They aren't the cuddly, winged babies that we see on Valentine's Day cards...*
- *They aren't beautiful, translucent females hovering above the ground...*
- *They aren't fragile little fairies...*
- *They aren't the spirits of our loved ones who have died who are now watching over us...*

The angels that we encounter in the Bible are glorious creatures with a terrifying presence and extraordinary power. Let's just look at a few examples...

1. The first time an angel appears in the biblical narrative is right after God's people rebelled against Him. We see an angel holding “a flaming sword” (**Gen 3:24**). He was an angelic guard wielding a sword that was on fire.⁶
2. This sword wasn't just for show. The Bible tells us that angels are terrifying warriors. For example, in the book of **2 Kings** we read about the time that Sennacherib, the evil king of Assyria, came with his army of **185,000 soldiers** to make war against King Hezekiah and the city of Jerusalem. So Hezekiah prayed for God's help, and God responded by sending an angel. One angel. Listen to what the Bible says happened next:

Read **2 Kings 19:35**⁷

³ See also **Col 2:18**.

⁴ 1:4–14; 2:1–9, 16.

⁵ See also **Heb 1:7**.

⁶ See also the fiery army of angels surrounding the prophet Elisha and his servant (**2 Kings 6:17**).

⁷ See also 2 Chr 32:21; Isa 37:36.

3. In **Revelation 20**, we read the story of Satan being tied up and cast into a bottomless pit so that he would no longer be able to deceive the nations (**20:1–3**). Do you know how many angels it took to bind Satan? One.

Their presence and their power is unlike anything we could even begin to fathom. And on the night that Jesus was betrayed, He told His disciples to put away their silly little swords because He had more than twelve legions of angels at His disposal (**Matt 26:53**).⁸

But angels aren't just warriors.

- Angels sing over creation (**Job 38:7**).
- Angels took part in giving the law to Moses (**Acts 7:53**).
- Angels shut the mouths of lions (**Dan 6:22**).
- Angels opened prison doors and set the captives free (**Acts 5:19; 12:5–9**).
- Angels delivered messages to God's people (e.g., **Matt 2:13; Luke 2:10–11**).

And the message in Hebrews is "*Jesus is better*".

Q. How?

- His *ownership*: everything in the universe belongs to Him (**Heb 1:2**).⁹
- His *creation*: He made the worlds (**Heb 1:2, 10**).
- His *glory*: while angels dwell in glory, Jesus *is* the glory of God (**Heb 1:3**).
- His *power*: all things are being upheld by the word of His power (**Heb 1:3**).
- His *salvation*: He washed away our sins all by Himself (**Heb 1:3**).
- His *authority*: He is seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high (**Heb 1:3**).
- His *name*: His name is more excellent than the angels (**Heb 1:4**).
- His *sonship*: He is the begotten Son of God the Father (**Heb 1:5–6**).
- His *deity*: Jesus is God (**Heb 1:8**).
- His *kingdom*: the kingdom of this world belongs to Him (**Heb 1:8**).
- His *eternality*: His throne is forever (**Heb 1:8**).
- His *gladness*: Jesus is happier than any created being (**Heb 1:9**).
- His *immutability*: the created universe changes, but Jesus never does (**Heb 1:11–12**).
- His *victory*: every enemy will one day serve Jesus as the King of Kings (**Heb 1:13**).
- His *supreme worth*: all the angels of God worship Jesus (**Heb 1:6**).

The most majestically beautiful and terrifyingly powerful beings in the created universe all worship Jesus. *What does this mean?* It means that Jesus is better than your wildest imaginations, and He is infinitely worthy of your worship. This is what the Psalmist was saying in **Psalms 73**

Whom have I in heaven but You?
And there is none upon earth that I desire beside You.
~ *Psalms 73:25*

⁸ A "legion" was somewhere between 4,000–6,000 soldiers. So, let's do some math! 12 legions multiplied by 4,000 soldiers per legion (a conservative number) equals **48,000 angelic soldiers**. We know that the angel in 2 Kings took down 185,000 soldiers by himself in a single night. So then, if 48,000 angels could each take care of 185,000 soldiers (48,000 x 185,000), that means that this angelic army at Jesus' disposal could have easily killed at least **8,880,000,000** (*eight billion, eight hundred and eighty million*) soldiers. And the group that came to arrest Jesus was probably around 30 men.

⁹ The Father has appointed the Son as the "heir of all things".

To worship this Jesus is the reason you exist (**Isa 43:7**).¹⁰

This is why you exist *as a person*, **and** this is why we exist *as a church*.

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim to the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

~ **1 Peter 2:9**

And worshiping of Jesus is the heartbeat of global missions.

I wonder if you have ever thought of the missionary calling in this way before?

We often talk about the global mission in terms of salvation: we have “*a heart for the lost*”, and “*we want to see people get saved*”. While this should be true of every single Christian...and it's how Hebrews chapter one ends (**1:14**), this should not be our only goal or our highest goal.

Yes, we want to see lost people experience salvation in Christ, but why?
So that they too might worship Jesus with us.

The heartbeat of the missionary adventure is people who have tasted and seen that Jesus is better than anything else in the universe treasuring Him above all else and longing to see His beauty and His power and His goodness and His Name in the hearts and on the lips of every people, tongue, tribe, and nation across the globe. The goal of missions is seeing Jesus lifted high. Yes, we want to see lost people saved and dead people raised to new life in Christ and captives set free and blind eyes opened ... and we want this because Jesus is worthy of this glory. He is worthy of their hearts. His is worthy of their affections and their allegiance. He is worthy of their worship. The global mission is not ultimately about the good of human beings, but about the unrivaled, incomparable, all-surpassing glory of God.¹¹

Worship is the goal & the fuel of missions.

- The work of global mission is made up of people who have tasted and seen that Jesus is better than anything else in the universe and who long to see all peoples brought into the worship of this Jesus.

CLOSE

Why do angels exist?

1. To worship God (**Heb 1:6**)
2. To minister to those who are being saved (**Heb 1:14**)

This is their calling: to worship God and to be used by God in His work of salvation – and this is the exact same calling God has given to you and me.

And if Jesus would leave the presence of His Father to bring us salvation, and if angels would leave the glories of heaven to come and help us on journey, what excuse do we have in not getting involved in this glorious work?

¹⁰ Isa 43:7, 21; 48:9–11; Eccl 12:13; Hab 2:14; Rom 11:36. 1 Cor 10:31; 2 Cor 4:15; Col 1:16; 3:17; Rev 4:11; 14:7; 15:4

¹¹ Mark Ballenger offers here a brief synopsis of the many Scripture passages showing that everything in universe is for the glory of God (which includes global missions): <https://applygodsword.com/god-does-everything-for-his-own-glory-verses/>