

Better
Than
the Angels



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Printed in the United States of America

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BETTER THAN THE ANGELS

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“Being made so much better than the angels, . . .” (Hebrews 1:4).

The angels of God are indeed wonderful and mighty beings, but they are only created beings, not omnipotent and omniscient like their Creator. A great host of them were present when God laid the earth’s solid foundations (see Job 38:4,7), when Christ was born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:13), and will be with Him when He comes to Earth again (II Thessalonians 1:7).

The angels of God surely comprise a mighty host of heaven. Even though a third of them have chosen to follow Lucifer (or Satan) in his rebellion against God (note Revelation 12:3,7), they are still more in number than men could ever count (Hebrews 12:22).

Attributes of Angels

Although angels are not omnipotent, they are very powerful, for they are said to *“excel in strength”* (Psalm 103:20). And, although they are not omniscient, they have great wisdom, *“the wisdom of an angel of God”* (11 Samuel 14:20).

They can also travel through space at very great speeds. When the angel Gabriel was sent by God to answer Daniel’s prayer, he was *“caused to fly swiftly”* (Daniel 9:21), reaching Daniel in the time it took him to finish his prayer.

Angels are essentially spirit beings. In reference to the

time of their creation, probably on the first day of creation week, the Bible says that God “*maketh His angels spirits*” (Psalm 104:4). Yet they somehow have the amazing ability to assume the appearance of men—not only visually but even bodily. For example, they ate a meal provided by Abraham and another by Lot (Genesis 18:8; 19:3). Frequent appearances of angels are cited in the Bible, always as men (never women or children, however, medieval artists and modern television notwithstanding).

Angels are immortal, evidently not subject to pain or death. On the other hand, unlike human beings, they are unable to reproduce, so that their number, great as it is, is fixed. Since they were created—not born—they are all called “sons of God,” even those who have rebelled against their Maker (e.g., Job 1:6, 2:1). In no sense, however, does this make them like *the* Son of God, for that One is “*The only begotten Son (of God)*” (John 1:18).

In some mysterious way, angels also partake of the nature of fire. “*And of the angels He saith, Who maketh His angels spirits, and His ministers a flame of fire*” (Hebrews 1:7). Angels are commonly associated in Scripture with the stars (which are, of course “flaming fires”). (Compare Judges 5:20; Job 38:7; Isaiah 14:12,14; Revelation 1:20; 12:3-9; etc.) Perhaps the stars of the heavens are where angels live, just as “*the earth hath He given to the children of men*” (Psalm 115:16). Both angels and stars are called “*the host of heaven*” in the Bible (e.g., Deuteronomy 4:19; I Kings 22:19).

Activities of Angels

All of the activities in which the faithful angels are involved have to do with carrying out the will of God as He

commands. *“Bless the LORD, ye His angels, . . . that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word. . . . ye ministers of His, that do His pleasure”* (Psalm 103:20-21).

These commands, of course, and the resulting actions, may vary widely. Individual angels may be assigned to meet particular local needs, such as when an angel rebuked the money-seeking prophet Balaam (Numbers 22:32) or stopped the mouths of the lions in the den into which Daniel had been cast (Daniel 6:21-22).

When necessary, God can dispatch a great army of angels, as He did when *“a great host”* of Syrian soldiers attempted to capture the prophet Elisha. God countered with a mountain-full of *“horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha”* (II Kings 6:14,17). When Jesus was being arrested just before His crucifixion, He calmed His disciples by assuring them that, if He so wished, He could *“now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels”* (Matthew 26:53).

Even though the term is not used in the Bible, believers do seem to have guardian angels. *“The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them”* (Psalm 34:7). Especially to those who serve the Lord and live for Him in a very close and obedient, possibly dangerous relationship, He promises that *“He shall give His angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways”* (Psalm 91:11). As far as little children are concerned, Jesus said: *“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”* (Matthew 18:10).

In general, one over-all function of the angels is to serve as *“ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who*

shall be heirs of salvation” (Hebrews 1:14).

Angels themselves are not heirs of salvation, of course, even though they are capable of committing sin. They do not die, but those who have sinned by following Satan (once the highest of all created angels) in his rebellious ambition to usurp God’s throne, will eventually be cast into the *“everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Matthew 25:41). This is the ultimate hell, the lake of fire. Satan himself will be there in the lake of fire and *“shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever”* (Revelation 20:10).

And the tragedy is that many people will be there, too, for *“whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire. . . . This is the second death”* (Revelation 20:15,14). The reason why that is such an ironic tragedy is that *“God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life”* (John 3:16). Whosoever will may come, but whosoever won’t must go!

Although angels are not candidates for salvation, they are intensely interested in the progress of those who are. *“Of which salvation the prophets have inquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: . . . which things the angels desire to look into”* (I Peter 1:10,12). One or more angels are present somehow in each local church if it is truly teaching the Word of God (note I Corinthians 11:10; Revelation 1:20; etc.).

In fact, Paul said that the revelations God had given him were to enable him to preach *“the unsearchable riches of Christ; And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in*

heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Ephesians 3:8-10).

What a wonderful mind-boggling revelation it is, when we realize that one or more angels of God, perhaps commissioned by the Lord, to protect, direct and inspect our progress before the Lord in our Christian faith, are actually also being taught by us as we *“work out y(our) own salvation with fear and trembling” (Philippians 2:12)!*

Creation of the Angels

It has been noted that the angels were created, along with everything else in the cosmos, by our omnipotent Creator. They were created in an ordered hierarchy, as *“principalities and powers in heavenly places” (Ephesians 3:10)*, evidently with Satan himself as the highest of all the cherubim, the *“anointed cherub” (Ezekiel 28:14)* over God’s throne.

Many of these—one third of all, in fact—now form a hierarchy of evil principalities and powers, seeking to defeat God and all His purposes in creation. They are following Satan (originally Lucifer—Isaiah 14:12) in this cosmic rebellion against his Creator.

God, of course, is a Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The member of the Godhead directly involved in the creation of all things, however, including the angels, was the Second Person, who eventually became incarnate in human flesh as the Lord Jesus Christ, *“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” (Colossians 1:15-16).

But a conundrum arises. How could He be *made* better than the angels when it was He who had created them? Yet that is what our opening text verse proclaims (Hebrews 1:4). Isn't God better than the angels He has created, just by definition?

Yet we see, in the very next chapter of Hebrews: *“Thou madest Him a little lower than the angels”* (Hebrews 2:7). Thus, He who had made all the angels was later made a little lower than the angels!

This is not a contradiction, of course, but a glorious truth. Our great Creator has willingly become our loving Redeemer, at tremendous cost to Himself. *“Christ Jesus: . . . being in the form of God. . . 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”* (Philippians 2:5-8).

Now we can begin to sense how man's rejection of such infinite love as that of God the Son for those created in His image, manifest in such infinite humiliation and suffering as He willingly endured on the cross, for our redemption, is the worst of all sins, deserving no smaller punishment than that of eternal separation from our Creator/Redeemer and all He provides.

But now let us re-read the opening verse in its context and its fullness. God has *“spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds; 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; 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?” (Hebrews 1:2-5).

The reason why His work of creating all things was not enough was because sin and death came in as awful intruders, and there was no one who could defeat Satan and his terrible purpose except the Creator Himself, and that only in accordance with His own perfect standards of law and justice.

When Satan had been able to induce Eve, then Adam, to sin, followed by God’s imposition of the Curse of decay and death on the world, *“that old serpent”* (Revelation 20:2) perhaps thought he was on the verge of winning the cosmic war.

“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” (Hebrews 2:9).

He who always was better than the angels allowed Himself to be made lower than the angels—that is, to become man—in order that He might satisfy His own righteous standards and thereby pay the death price (the *“wages of sin”*—Romans 6:23) to redeem lost men.

But death was not the final end.” . . . *that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil”* (Hebrews 2:14). He became, in fact, *“the firstborn from the dead”* (Colossians 1:18). He was once again made better than the angels—this time, not in terms of innate deity but in terms of perfected humanity, as demonstrated both by His sinless human life and by His victorious bodily resurrection from death. Again note Hebrews 1:5. *“For unto which of the angels said He at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee?”*

This declaration by the Father of Christ's divine Sonship was applied specifically to His resurrection, not to His birth as a babe in Bethlehem. This had already been made clear and certain in Acts 13:33, where it says "*God hath ... raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.*" Both passages are quoting Psalm 2:7.

Son of God

The Lord Jesus Christ is, therefore, the Son of God, and thus far better than any angel, on the basis of at least six different types of proof. First, of course, is that of His position in the Godhead, being eternally "begotten," or "generated" from the Father. His "*goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting*" (Micah 5:2). He has been the "*same yesterday, and to day, and for ever*" (Hebrews 13:8). He is "*the only begotten Son, which is [from eternity] in the bosom of the Father*" (John 1:18).

Secondly, He was the unique Son of God in view of His miraculous conception and virgin birth. The angel Gabriel, himself one of the archangels, told Mary: "*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). Uniquely "*made of a woman*" (Galatians 4:4), and fulfilling the "*seed of the woman*" prophetic promise of Genesis 3:15, as well as the "*virgin*" prophecy of Isaiah 7:14, the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem was absolutely unique in all the history of the world.

He was also proclaimed directly from heaven to be the beloved Son of His heavenly Father at His baptism (Matthew 3:17) and also on the Mount of the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5). Peter later testified again many years later of that great

event. *“For He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount”* (II Peter 1:17-18).

Another indication of His unique divine Sonship is that He is said to be the sole heir of all the Father’s possessions. This promise was written in the first specific reference to Christ as the Son: *“I will declare the decree: the LORD hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession”* (Psalm 2:7-8). As already noted, *“Being made so much better than the angels, as He hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they”* (Hebrews 1:4).

Fifth, He is actually called “Lord” by God the Father in Psalm 110:1: *“The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool.”* The same relation is seen in Psalm 45:7. *“. . . therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.”* Both these passages are quoted in the eulogy to the Son in the first chapter of Hebrews (verses 13,9).

The most important proof that He is God, however, at least to those early Gentile seekers of truth, was almost certainly His bodily resurrection. No one else has ever defeated death. He has thus been *“declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead”* (Romans 1:4). He is also called *“the first begotten”* (Hebrews 1:6), *“the firstborn from the dead”* (Colossians 1:18), *“the firstborn among many brethren”* (Romans 8:29) and just *“the firstborn”* (Hebrews

12:23), all in reference to His resurrection.

Therefore, both in His absolute deity and His victorious humanity, He is far better than the angels, great and important as they surely are.

Son of Man

Immensely vital though His status as Son of God may be, it is perhaps even more wonderful to know that Christ called Himself “Son of Man” some 80 times, far more than He ever called Himself “Son of God.” He has thus identified Himself eternally with human beings. Though He was God from past eternity. He is now also glorified Man through future eternity.

The only physical description that we have of Christ is of Him in His glorified human body after His resurrection and glorification. Yet even then He still is described as “*one like unto the Son of man*” (Revelation 1:13). The same term is used again (the last time it is used in the Bible) when He is seen as preparing to reap the harvest of the earth in terrible judgment (Revelation 14:14).

The very first time He called Himself by that title, however, was in the plaintive statement recorded in Matthew 8:20. “*The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay His head.*” He whose true home was in heaven on His throne became homeless here on the earth He had made and given to men. “*For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich*” (II Corinthians 8:9). Amazing grace!

Without His incarnation as man, of course, we would be lost sinners eternally, imprisoned forever with the devil and his angels in the lake of fire. “*All have sinned,*” is the decision

of the righteous Judge, and there is *“none righteous, no, not one”* (Romans 5:12; 3:10). That is, none save the Son of Man, who therefore could take the sin of the entire world upon Himself, and then pay sin’s awful penalty of agonizing death while altogether cut off from His Father for three terrible hours on the cross. In the words of the wonderful old gospel song: *“Oh, the love that drew salvation’s plan, Oh, the grace that brought it down to man, at Calvary!”*

But, oh, the terrible future that those must face who reject or ignore such love and grace! *“Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, . . . and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?”* (Hebrews 10:29). *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Hebrews 10:31).

That is why it is so vitally important to recognize the Lord Jesus as perfect Son of Man as well as mighty Son of God. *“For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist”* (II John 7).

It is significant that Satan and his hosts of demonic angels would never acknowledge Jesus as Son of Man, even though they did acknowledge Him as Son of God (e.g., Matthew 4:3; 8:28-29). They refuse to acknowledge that the Son of God has *“come in the flesh”* as Son of Man (I John 4:2-3) because man’s redemption and their coming doom are contingent on that great event.

Yes, Jesus Christ *“was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, . . . that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man”* (Hebrews 2:9).

But He defeated death and rose bodily from the grave, so that now *“we see Jesus, . . . crowned with glory and honor”* (Hebrews 2:9). He died *“for the sins of the whole*

world” (I John 2:2), but that is not all that His substitutionary death accomplished.

“Having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it” (Colossians 2:15).

“Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same; that through death He might destroy Him that had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Hebrews 2:14).

And now that the Lord Jesus Christ is again better than the angels, by virtue of His victory over Satan on the cross and His glorious resurrection from death and hell, *“He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them”* (Hebrews 7:25). He is forevermore a true MAN in the glory. Someday soon, in our own glorified bodies, we can see and thank Him face to face!

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