

TEXT: Hebrews 1:5-2:4

TITLE: No Greater Messenger – Part 2.

HOMILETICAL IDEA – We must listen carefully to the message of Jesus Christ.

INTRODUCTION: <Read 1:5-2:4, prayer, now introduction to lead the audience along in a thought pattern related to the greatness of Christ.>

To start with, I want you to note the theme Hebrews. Dr. Compton says: “The author has a twofold purpose: a) to exhort his readers to perseverance and to Christian maturity; and b) to warn his readers of the dire consequences were they to fall away from the faith by re-embracing Judaism.” There is the *positive* – keep on and move on to Christian maturity - and the *negative* – do not fall back into your old ways. Does that capture your attention this morning?

If it does not, it should. You should be always interested in these two truths – to keep on going in the faith and to avoid falling away. Heb 10:23 – hold fast vs. 10:38 – no shrinking back. That’s what I want for myself. How about you?

As we continue in our study of the book of Hebrews, I want you to think of the section we examine this morning in terms of the larger tapestry or quilt of which we have just spoken – that is, pressing on to maturity in Christ, and not falling backward. This is one section or thread of the author’s argument to attempt to accomplish those things.

Such a tapestry must be skillfully woven together of many individual pieces. Each piece is a theological proposition or argument that is used to support the construction of the whole. Imagine then that you are one watching this tapestry be constructed before your very eyes. You could be a Hebrew Christian who wonders what your relation to the law is. Should I break completely with the old ways of doing things? Must I do so in order to continue faithful to God or can I mix the two?

Perhaps on the other hand you are a Hebrew of the synagogue who has not yet converted to Christ. (I think the book deals with these folks as well because the author could hardly have expected every last one of his audience to be Christians – many, but probably not all.) You say to yourself, “Why should I turn to Christ?” “Who is this Christ?” “Why isn’t Moses and the Law good enough for me?” “What has changed now?”

Transition from introduction to body: In any case, then, with a strong Jewish background in the audience, there is some obvious “baggage” that needs to be dealt with. There is Moses. The Law. The Levites. The Prophets. But there is another one as well—angels. They seem to be a pinnacle of God’s creation.

I. Angels were highly regarded in Jewish thought.

If you were a Jewish person, your understand of angels might look something like this:

- A. **Background.** An extra-biblical angelology is developed over the years as to the origin of angels, their worship of God, their functions. They were prominent, though they were not worshipped because they were creatures, servants of God. I had the impression before I studied this that angels were esteemed as objects of idolatrous worship. They were not. However, they were revered to a certain extent.
- B. **Pre-Law.** Angels appeared to Abraham, Lot, and Jacob. The so-called “angel of the Lord” is mentioned numerous times in this portion of the Scriptures, as well as later to direct, guide, and judge God’s people and the nations.
- C. **The Law.** But there are passages that speak of the presence and activity of angels at the giving of the law which elevated their place in the Jewish mind (**Deut 33:2, Acts 7:53, Gal 3:19, Heb 2:2**). In **Jude 9**, the account of the archangel Michael’s dispute with Satan over the body of Moses also contributes to the high Jewish view of angels. There were protectors (**Ps 91:11**).
- D. **Apocrypha.** In apocryphal literature between the Old and New Testaments, angels were used to transmit revelation from God; angels offered praise to God, acted as intermediaries in prayer between man and God, or as intercessors for people, as interpreters of God’s revelation, and protectors of man.
- E. **Magic and Mythology.** In non-orthodox Jewish settings, angels were used in magic. Strictly monotheistic Judaism was not swayed from the uniqueness of God, but any mythological tendencies they picked up from Babylon and other places in the latter half of the 1st millennium B.C. were ascribed to angels instead of gods, as in the Greek and Roman pantheon of gods. [There was a bunch of ideas throughout history about false angels and Gen 6, and their influence upon men. They may have been a convenient scapegoat or reason for the existence of evil.]
- [F. **Debate.** The Sadducees denied the existence of angels (**Acts 23:8**)! The Pharisees accepted them. This shows the vast differences in understanding about the angels that existed in the first century. It is not clear then, that *every* Jewish person had the same regard for angels.]
- G. **Qumran.** The Essenes from Qumran had a very advanced angelology, particularly in apocalyptic literature. Many categories of angels are introduced during this time period. Some of the Qumran literature (1QH) shows angels worshipping God and this being a pattern for the community’s worship of Him, but worship of angels was forbidden.
- H. **Synagogue.** Going into the synagogue period of Judaism, the prayers of angels and people were seen to be somewhat substitutes for sacrifice at the altar (Sanders). This carries on into later centuries to the present day, with an increasing emphasis upon angels in certain circles.

Illustration: Many are fascinated with angels today, though not with the Biblical view of them, which we will shortly see. With “Touched by an Angel,” and all the angel figurines you see all

around, paintings with angels carrying people to heaven, it is obvious that people are still fascinated with angels. This is baggage for people today, just like it was for the Hebrew audience of yesteryear.

Transition: With this background on angels, let us turn our thoughts to a major point of the author (not *the* main point, but *a* major point). That is that...

II. The Son is vastly superior to angels.

The author of Hebrews lays out a great contrast for us in an attempt to unload our baggage. To do this, he quotes about 35 passages from the OT to develop his argument.

We'll walk through the text verse by verse to see how he masterfully uses the OT scriptures. These are, as far as we know, trusted without reservation by his audience. Notice the parallel between what we studied last time and what we are looking at this time. Look at verses 1 to 4 once again. Do you notice all the things that the author boldly declares about Christ in his comparison of Christ to the angels and how he reiterates that in the following verses through the end of the chapter?

Here are all the propositions that are made in 1:5-14:

1. Christ is the Son of God. The angels are not.
2. Christ is to be worshiped by angels. Angels are servants.
3. Christ is the very essence of God. The angels are not.
4. Christ is the creator and sustainer of the universe. The angels are not.
5. Christ is permanent and unchangeable. The creation is not, not even the angels.
6. Christ is exalted at the right hand of God. The angels are not.

And then notice how he backs up what he says from the Bible that his readers would be familiar with.

- A. Christ is superior because He is the Son of God.

1:5 proves this by quoting **2 Sam 7:14** and **Psalms 2:7**. As the Son, Christ is an heir of all things, as shown in the quote of **Psalms 2:8**.

- B. Christ is superior because He is the Heir of all things.

1:6 proves this by quoting **Psalms 97:7** which says he deserves the worship of the angels. In fact, **1:7** and **1:14** testify from **Psalms 104:4** that angels are only ministering spirits, not to be worshipped!

- C. Christ is superior because He is God himself.

The Son of God is explicitly called God in **Psalms 45:6-7**. The Psalmist addresses God and refers to the God of God... This proves **1:8**. Furthermore, in **1:9** it is said that the Son hates iniquity, which the author of Hebrews previously said "He made purification of sins."

- D. Christ is superior because He is the Creator and Sustainer of the universe.

1:10-12 prove by quoting **Psalms 102:25-27**. Not only is Christ the creator and sustainer, but He is compared to their changeable nature – He is immutable and eternal.

E. Christ is superior because He is the One who sits at God's right hand.

1:13 proves this by quoting from **Psalm 110:1**, a clear reference to Jesus Christ. Here God is speaking to the Lord. If there was any doubt as to the referent in the previous parts of the author's argument, this buttons it up as the strongest proof.

Summary: The author of Hebrews has understood the reverence given to angels in the Hebrew community. He de-emphasizes the reverence that has been given to them by emphasizing their subordinate, servant role to God and Christ. The real issue is the reverence (worship!) that is due to Jesus Christ!

Transition: At this point, we get to the main point. You might be wondering, why in the world does the Bible spend so many verses and quote so many OT texts to prove this point? What is this guy up to? Get this, since it is the point of the whole message:

III. You must listen to the salvation message.

This is the crux of the argument in this whole section of the book of Hebrews. The author doesn't tell us all of these facts and figures about Christ as if they were just that—dry information to be ingested and regurgitated on a quiz. No, rather his argument regarding Christ, prophets, and angels is the servant of a larger argument, and that is, that we must pay heed to what we hear in the Word of God.

A. We have to listen because of the greatness of the messenger and the corresponding greatness of the message. (2:1a, 3a)

“What we have heard” in **2:1a** corresponds to “so great a salvation” in **2:3a**. In other words, *because* there is no greater messenger than in Jesus Christ, there is no greater message. It must be heeded!

The Hebrews knew what this message was all about – See Heb 6:1-2.

Note that I would not limit this message to salvation proper alone, but to the whole revelation as well, since Christ authorized his apostles to give it (John 16).

B. We have to listen so that we don't drift away (2:1b). The analogy is one of a ship drifting away from dock or losing its anchor.

This is one of several warning passages in Hebrews, which are designed to keep us as Christians on track, i.e. so that we don't fall off the track and get into trouble.

Application: PLEASE do not get side tracked in all the muddle about these warning passages. Philosophizing will cause you to miss the point. I suppose you can hear the cacophony of voices in your head from your studies on this topic of the warnings—“Can you lose your salvation?” “Eternal security.” “Loss of reward.” “Hypothetical condition.” “Assurance.” “Punishment.” “Once saved always saved.” Warnings are not primarily in the Bible to be debated, but to be followed, because they are guard rails designed to scare you off the wrong path. They push you toward what you are supposed to be doing. They are one means that God uses to protect you from sin.

C. We have to listen because of the argument from lesser to greater shows that drifting away is very dangerous (v. 2-4).

If the word of angels is steadfast and punishment was sure when it is ignored, then much worse will be the punishment when one ignores the Son of God (2:2-3).

Here is the lesser part of the argument: angels → spoke → unalterable → penalty for disobedience.

Question: What is the “penalty for disobedience”? You might think of several things, here are two: 1) the penalties attached with disobedience to the Mosaic law, since that law was “ordained by angels”; 2) a specific example of Lot and Sodom and Gomorrah when the angels directed him to leave: Lot’s wife received a swift penalty, while the cities were leveled.

Here is the greater part of the argument: Jesus Christ, who is greater than the angels → spoke, a greater message → confirmed by prophets → in turn confirmed by God-given signs, wonders, miracles, gifts → similarly unalterable → punishable in greater severity.

Question: The author asks, “how shall we escape?” This indicates the great penalty that awaits those who do not hear the message? The situation is far more hopeless than for Sodom and Gomorrah. In fact, the end of such people “is to be burned” (6:8). Furthermore, such are worthy of more “sorer punishment” (10:28-31) which is a very fearful thing.

Transition from body to conclusion: Do you see then how the author climaxes his argument in this statement: Given the previous facts about Christ’s greatness, we have to listen to the message that he has delivered.

CONCLUSION: If you do not listen to the word of Christ, then, there is a serious problem. We could question your rationality if you do not, because of the great danger there is in drifting away. In fact, more than danger, it is sure and sore punishment.

Illustration: It’s like letting go of your anchor within a 100 yards of the Niagara falls. You will be ruined!

However, the opposite of drifting away is staying anchored. Anchored to the Lord Jesus Christ. Listening to the message allows you not only to avoid sure destruction, but on the positive side to keep you persevering and maturing in Christ.

How can we do this? You want a specific application, right? 2:1 has it. “Pay close attention to what you have heard.” That’s it. You have learned from your childhood, from your parents, teachers, etc. how to pay attention, to follow instructions. That’s one big reason why we teach our children these things, so that when it comes to the eternally important word of God, we can pay attention and follow its instructions. As I tried to demonstrate from the text, our job is to carefully listen to Jesus’ message.

<pause><prayer>

Informal Bibliography

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Morris, Leon. Hebrews in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Zondervan, 1978. Idea is to try to get Jewish Christians to decisively split from their Judaism (which was religio licita) vs. Christianity (religio illicita). The official kind of persecution did not really begin until 250 AD (until 311 or so) however, so I think it may be a bit much to call it religio illicita at that time. Before that persecutions were rather isolated, sporadic. Christianity was considered at this early date a sub-sect of Jews (particularly under Claudius).

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