

HEBREWS VERSE BY VERSE - The New and Living Way - Part four

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HOW SHALL WE READ OUR OLD TESTAMENTS? - How the New Testament Interprets the Old (continued)

Hebrews 1:7-14 - "Of the angels he says, 'He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.' [8] But of the Son he says, 'Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. [9] You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.' [10] And, 'You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; [11] they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, [12] like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.' [13] And to which of the angels has he ever said, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'? [14] Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?"

I think it's important to see what's going on in this very involved sermon text. It's never easy to deal with a passage all tangled up with back-to-back quotations from other sources. These words don't *flow* with the poetic ease of 1 Corinthians 13 or straight forward instruction of the book of James. But they also carry lessons and benefits other texts don't.

We're still looking at the way the New Testament teaches the church to read the Old. The writer is taking a whole chapter to unpack the idea he briefly stated in the very first two verses - **Hebrews 1:1-2** - "Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, [2] but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world."

These "**last days**" are the days following the Incarnation of God the Son right up to this Sunday morning as we all sit in this church. These are the days of the Gospel. These are the days of the New Covenant. This is where we all live while we wait for Jesus to bring these "**last days**" to a close with His Second Advent - the Second Coming.

And the great value - and the great difficulty - of our text this morning is we are being taught not only the meaning of **this** text but the **method** to find the meaning of **other** texts - **Old Testament** texts specifically. That's what the writer emphasizes in those first two verses of chapter one. God spoke in "**many ways**" at "**many times**" through many "**prophets.**" But those **ways** and those **times** are all finished now. The Son is God's final word. He's the Word all the other revelations were preparing for.

So our writer is laboring to say now that we have the **final** Word we can see more clearly and accurately what God was up to in all the **other** words spoken earlier by those prophets. We finally have light shining on all those other texts which couldn't be fully appreciated without beginning with the Incarnate Christ, God the Son.

There are **seven** Old Testament texts strung together and quoted in this first chapter of Hebrews. Why not just one, or two? Because the writer wants these Jewish believers to whom he writes - and you and me, to whom the Holy Spirit directs these verses - to learn a **methodology** - to apply a **way of seeing** - to our Old Testaments.

He wants **all** readers of his words to see the **preparation of the whole world for the coming of Jesus, the Christ, God the Son,** as the whole **reason** for the Old Testament. God's purpose never was to create a **stand-alone Jewish religion.** But He wants to help the **New Testament church** - that's us - to see the ongoing **value** of the progressive revelation of the whole Bible as God's inspired Word when taken in its proper context and redemption-filled, historic sweep.

So we're going to honor the intent of the writer of our text today. We won't just brush through these tricky quotes so we can rush on to less dense sentences. These words were written with high teaching purpose and the Holy Spirit requires us to honor them.

1) ANGELS ARE SET APART AND DISTINGUISHED BY THEIR SERVICE. THE SON IS SET APART AND DISTINGUISHED BY HIS NATURE

Hebrews 1:6-8 - "And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." [7] Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire." [8] But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom."

Certainly there are places in the Scripture where angels *collectively* are called “**sons of God**” - **Job 38:6-7** - “**On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, [7] when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?**” But there is no place where any *individual* angel or person is called *the* Son of God. This title is reserved for the pre-existent Son, sent *incarnate* into this world - “**...when he brings the firstborn into the world....**” (6). That title - “**firstborn into the world**” - refers to the moment of *incarnation where the pre-existent One took on human flesh and nature.*

We remind ourselves every Christmas the Son was worshiped by the angels. This is our writer’s point. Angels are certainly wonderful beings. Those who didn’t fall with Lucifer are worthy of mention for their devoted service to God. They are *quickness* in their obedience. Our text says they move like the “*wind*” moves (1:7), without hesitation or second guessing in response to divine will. And they are like a “*flame of fire*” (1:7), pure in their motives and interests.

So our writer’s point isn’t to denigrate angels in any way. Jesus said we should all pray and aim our lives to obey God *on earth* the way angels do His will around His throne *in heaven*. Angels are special indeed.

But angels are not of the same *nature* as the Son. Angels are *created* beings. The Son is the *Creator* of all there is. Angels are a part of the created order. The Son is not. The Son is “*born*” into this earthly world, to be sure. He is the *firstborn* in the sense of His *entry point* into the created order and His work makes Him the *first born* of a whole yet-to-come new creation. He is *first* in the sense of drawing in others who will be *born* into God’s eternal family.

But having said all of that, the Son is never said to be of the same order as this created realm. He isn’t *just* another angel or *just* another man. And the purpose behind this understanding isn’t *intellectual*. It’s *doxology*. It’s *worship*.

We may *listen* to prophets. But it is idolatrous to *worship* them. Angels are special indeed. The Bible hints at their occasional role in *revelation* as with the giving of the Law (**Galatians 3:19**), revealing information of the birth of John the Baptist and Jesus (**Luke 1:11, Luke 1:26**), and so on. But we don’t *worship* angels.

We don’t worship on the basis of *teaching given* or *revelation given*. We worship on the basis of *divine nature*. This is the unique stance of Christianity. We don’t worship any prophet (as with *Mohamad*) and we aren’t awaiting the return of any prophet like *Elijah*. But we *do* worship Jesus. And we do so because Jesus *received* and *encouraged* such worship in the New Testament.

To this very moment our Lord still receives the worship due Him around the throne - **Revelation 5:6-14** - “**And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. [7] And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. [8] And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. [9] And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, [10] and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth.” [11] Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, [12] saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” [13] And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” [14] And the four living creatures said, “Amen!” and the elders fell down and worshiped.”**

2) UNLIKE PROPHETS AND ANGELS, THE SON IS ETERNAL AND THE CREATOR OF ALL THAT EXISTS

Hebrews 1:8-10 - “**But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. [9] You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.” [10] And, “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands....”**

The first portion of these words are a quote from **Psalm 45**, which was originally written as a Davidic kingly wedding

celebration. We may be shocked to read those words, ***“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever....”*** in original context but Israel's treatment of her king - God's representative ruler over them - as God Himself was common. David was God's anointed - selected specifically by God Himself. So David is celebrated as God's very presence on Israel's throne. This is the original, preparatory context of Psalm 45.

But what our text in Hebrews does with these verses is powerful. The writer takes those words from the Psalm and applies them directly to the ***final kingly heir of David***. He applies them to the ***ultimate*** Davidic King - ***“But of the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever’(8)***. Those six words aren't a part of Psalm 45. They are the writer of Hebrew's explanation of the rest of the quote. And the writer's point is there never was another descendant of David who ruled, or could rule, ***“forever and ever.”*** The text points to the final ruling Davidic King - Jesus, the Christ.

Also, unlike any of the previous Davidic kings who all had their faults and moral weaknesses, this King will have an ***absolute bias toward holiness and against sin - Hebrews 1:8b-9 - “....the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. [9] You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness....”***

There never was a king like this in the Old Testament. Such a King will have no problem separating the wicked from the righteous at the final judgment (***Matthew 25***). He takes His ***greatest delight*** in bringing the redeemed into His kingdom - ***Hebrews 1:9b - “....therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.”*** This Divine King will find greater joy in ***delivering*** those captive to sin and Satan than they will have in ***being*** delivered. Such is the heart of grace and love in the divine Son.

3) **THE ORIGIN AND DESTINY OF THIS WHOLE CREATED REALM ARE BOUND UP IN THE GREATNESS OF THE DIVINE SON**

Hebrews 1:10-12 - “And, ‘You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens *are the work of your hands*; [11] they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, [12] like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.”

These words are quoted from **Psalm 102:25-27**. The whole Psalm is fascinating. It opens with the Psalmist in great distress, pouring his heart out to the Lord (1-2). Both he and his city - Zion - have been experiencing divine judgment (3-11). He prays for restoration so he and his people may once more rejoice and praise God in Zion (21-22).

And it is during this time of trial and prayer he realizes the brevity and uncertainty of life (23-24). And this is what leads the Psalmist to contrast this with the permanence and durability of God. He focuses on divine, eternal help because any lesser help is no help at all. Even if the Psalmist found instant victory over every foe the taste of victory would be short lived.

Here's why. What is true of the Psalmist is true of each of us. We all ***“....wear out like a garment”(12)***. We can't hold on to any of our gains. We can't keep our loved ones. We're like old socks or thread-bare towels. Everything about our earthly lives wears out so quickly. We take pictures of our closest loved ones in our happiest moments because we know all those moment are unrepeatable - gone forever.

If there is any hope for time crinkled people like us it will have to come from another realm altogether. And this is the part of the Psalm the writer of Hebrews quotes and focuses his attention on. A ***deliverance*** and a ***victory*** is coming of a greater magnitude than anything the Psalmist could imagine. Those words of might and eternity and all the hopes tied up in them are now quoted and applied directly to the ***fulfillment*** of the Psalmist's prayer - ***God the Son - Hebrews 12:11-12 - “....they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, [12] like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.”***

Those words of eternal divine majesty and help find their final fulfillment in the redemptive work of Jesus, the Christ.

4) **THE GREATEST HOPE AND DELIVERANCE THE OLD TESTAMENT WRITERS LONGED FOR AND PRAYED FOR WAS FULFILLED IN THE INCARNATION AND REDEMPTIVE WORK OF GOD THE SON**

Hebrews 1:13-14 - “ And to which of the angels has he ever said, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”? [14] Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?”

The last part of **verse 13** is a direct quote from **Psalm 110:1**. And the question at the beginning of **verse 13** shows the writer still has the great comparison between the Son and the angels on his mind - **Hebrews 1:13a** - "**And to which of the angels has he ever said, 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'?**"

The question is obviously meant to be rhetorical. The answer is **zero**. Words like this were never spoken to any angelic beings. They are reserved for the Son alone. As if to underscore the point, the closing words of this chapter ask the same question in different words. "***Don't angels just serve? Never forget that!***"(14).

So here we are. We've seen this repeated pattern of finding the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophets and writings in the New Testament arrival of God the Son.

Is this the right way to do Bible reading? And all I can tell you is it's the way the New Testament writers saw **their** Scriptures. And it's also the way **Jesus** saw His. In His argument with the Jewish religious leaders of His day Jesus took the same approach. In fact, He uses this final quote from **Psalm 110** we're closing with today:

Matthew 22:41-45 - "Now while the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them a question, [42] saying, "What do you think about the Christ? ***Whose son is he?***" They said to him, "***The son of David.***" [43] He said to them, "How is it then that David, in the Spirit, calls him Lord, saying, [44] "***The Lord said to my Lord, 'Sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet'?***" [45] ***If then David calls him Lord, how is he his son?***"

Jesus poses a riddle with a powerful answer. Notice it is **Jesus** who initiates this issue - "***...Jesus asked them a question....***"(41). And the question is bending the brains of these religious leaders who acknowledge their heritage in David but deny Jesus as the Messiah. So the question, once boiled down to its essence, is "***Whose son is this Jesus, claiming to be the Messiah, standing right in front of them?***"

"***Whose son is he?***"(42). They know the answer immediately. Well, he's **David's** offspring, of course (42). Then why, Jesus asks, quoting this **110th Psalm**, does David call his son, "***Lord?***" - **Psalm 110:1** - "***The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.'***"

And so the question is left hanging in the air. The coming Messiah is David's offspring. Yes. And the Messiah is David's Lord. Also yes. And we're left, just like these Trinity denying Jewish leaders were left, with these **two** facts. With regard to Christ's **humanity** He is David's offspring. With regard to Christ's **pre-existent deity** He is David's Lord.

Now remember where we are. One of the key principles of this involved teaching is we use the full revelation of the New Testament as the surest way of **seeing** the gradually unfolding revelation of the Old Testament. Does this principle stand up with what we've just read from this final quotation used in Hebrews? Do we find clear revelation of Jesus, the Christ, being **both** David's son and David's Lord? Is there more evidence available?

Romans 1:1-4 - "**Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, [2] which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, [3] concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh [4] and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord....**"

Here is the One we worship. Here is the One **angels** worship. Here is the hope of the world. Here is the One - the **only** one - who will rule when He comes again with every enemy under His feet.