

THE EPISTLES TO THE HEBREWS

HEBREWS 1:1-4:13, THE SUPERIORITY OF THE PERSON OF CHRIST

INTRODUCTION

A. Outline of Hebrews (to be finalized at completion of Hebrews study)

1. The superiority of the person of Christ (1:1-4:13)
 - a. Christ has the superior message (1:1-2a)
 - b. Christ is the superior person (1:2b-3)
 - c. Christ is superior to angels (1:4-2:18)
 - 1) Evidence from His deity (1:4-14)
 - 2) First warning passage (2:1-4)
 - 3) Evidence from His humanity (2:5-18)
 - a) His humiliation and exaltation (2:5-9)

B. Review

1. J. Dwight Pentecost, “. . . the doctrines the epistle presents, the warnings it delivers, and the exhortations it gives all were intended to prevent regression and to encourage continuous dynamic development toward spiritual maturity.
2. Donald Hagner, *These four verses provide a parenthetical exhortation, the first of a series of such exhortations following the author’s well-designed style and method. He will not discuss theology in the abstract, but constantly calls his readers to its practical significance and to the appropriate response. He writes indeed as an accomplished theologian but also as a preacher with distinct pastoral concerns.*

C. Comments on Hebrews 2:5-9

1. Thomas Constable, *Some of the original Jewish readers of Hebrews felt inclined to abandon the Christian faith because of Jesus’ humanity. The writer stressed His deity in chapter one because some Jews failed to appreciate that. In this chapter he showed why Jesus was not inferior because He was a man. Jesus’ humanity enabled Him to regain man’s lost dominion (vv. 5–9)...*
2. William L. Lane, *The function of v 5 is to link two chains of OT citations. The first (1:5–13) develops the superiority of Jesus in his exaltation to the angels. The second (2:6–16) refutes the objections that could be mustered against that superiority on the ground that the Son assumed a condition inferior to that of the angels and submitted to death (v 9).*
3. R. Kent Hughes, *The humanity, the suffering, and the death of Jesus all seem to point with unmistakable clarity to his inferiority in comparison with the angels. The matter obviously demands attention, if the author’s argument is to stand; and rather than shrinking from the problem, he effectively turns it to his advantage.*

HEBREWS 1:4-2:18, JESUS CHRIST IS SUPERIOR TO ANGELS

HEBREWS 2:5-9, HIS HUMILIATION AND EXALTATION

A. Dominion over the world is not for angels (5), *For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.*

1. *For*

- a. This looks back to Hebrews 1:13, *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”?*
- b. Thomas Constable, *The writer returned to his main argument (ch. 1). He did so to develop the destiny of Jesus Christ more fully so his readers would strengthen their commitment to continue following Him.*

2. *subjected*

- a. It means *to obey, submit, to put in subjection.*
- b. Philippians 3:21, *who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.*

3. *the world to come*
 - a. Some give this a future perspective.
 - 1) Thomas Constable, *"The world to come" refers to the inhabited earth under Jesus Christ's reign (during the Millennium and from then on; cf. 1:8–9, 11–13).*
 - 2) J. Dwight Pentecost, *This will occur at His second advent when He returns to this earth to sit as David's Son on David's throne and rule over David's kingdom in fulfillment of God's covenants and promises.*
 - b. Some focus on the present into the future
 - 1) H. D. M. Spence, *...the complete fulfillment of the prophetic anticipation is to be looked for in the second advent, whatever earnest and foretaste of it there may be already under the gospel dispensation.*
 - 2) Raymond Brown, *The world to come is the totally new world-order which has already begun in Christ. In other words, it is the new age, the era of salvation. It is not, therefore, something reserved entirely for the future, even though it has a future dimension of rich and exciting significance. In Christ we have already entered God's stupendous future.*
 - 3) Donald Hagner, *...the world of which the author has been speaking is that new reality already brought into existence by the exaltation of the Son but the end result of which remains yet to be experienced; hence it remains that world yet to come.*
4. *of which we are speaking*
 - a. Thomas Constable, *...indicates that the writer was resuming his exposition and continuing his thought from 1:5–14.*
 - b. Zane Hodges, *It is obvious that the first chapter, with its manifest stress on the kingship and future reign of the Son, was about this very subject.*
 - c. Donald Hagner, *When our author adds 'about which we are speaking,' we encounter the tension between fulfillment and consummation that runs through all of Christian theology. That is, there is a sense in which the world to come has come already and yet also a sense in which it is yet to come. We have already encountered this tension in considering the meaning of the phrase "these last days" (1:2) and the quotation in 1:13. The Son has been exalted to the right hand of God, the position of all power, and yet some time is to elapse before his enemies are put under his feet.*
5. Comments
 - a. Zane Hodges, *It has been claimed that the Dead Sea Scrolls show that the sectarians of Qumran believed that the coming Age would be marked by the dominion of Michael and his angelic subordinates. The statement here by the writer of Hebrews forcefully refutes this view.*
 - b. Raymond Brown, *The scrolls (Dead Sea) had a good deal to say about the role of angels. This sect awaited the appearance of two Messianic figures, one kingly, the other priestly (the priest being the greater), both of whom would become subordinate to Michael, the archangel. In their thinking, the world to come would eventually be subjected to the authority of angels. But our author insists that this world to come is certainly not included within the range of angelic responsibility. In the new world-order 'the place of honor and authority belongs to the glorified Son,*

B. Dominion over coming world is for the Son (6-8a)

1. An understanding of the writer's use of Psalm 8
 - a. Douglas Mangum, *A quotation from Ps 8:4–6 expresses the incarnation of the Son in a way that will set up an explanation of his suffering and death in the next unit. The psalm highlights the exalted place of humanity, and here the author of Hebrews extrapolates this to highlight the exaltation and glorification of the divine Son of Man, Jesus.*
 - b. Zane Hodges, *While the psalm as a whole is often read as a general statement about the role of man in God's Creation, it is clear in the light of Hebrews 2:5 and the application that follows in verses 8b–9 that the author of Hebrews read it primarily as messianic and eschatological (future events).*
 - c. Thomas Constable, *The writer interpreted this passage (Ps. 8:4–6) as Messianic. "Son of Man" is a Messianic title (Dan. 7:13–14). As a man Jesus was temporarily lower than the angels during His earthly ministry. His crowning took place at His ascension as did His receiving authority over all creation.*
 - d. Raymond Brown, *He has used Old Testament Scripture in chapter 1 to portray Christ's superiority over the angels as the Son of God. Here he presents Christ as for a time lower than the angels, the Son of man. When Jesus assumed our human nature he willingly took upon himself our frustrated, suffering and threatened humanity.*

2. An examination of Hebrews 2:6-8a
 - a. The priority of God in revelation (6a), ***It has been testified somewhere,***
 - 1) It is a citation from Psalm 8:4-6, *what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet,*
 - 2) William L. Lane, *...because it is God who speaks in the OT, the identity of the person through whom he uttered his word is relatively unimportant. A vague allusion is sufficient. It is the substantial authority of what is said, not its source, which is of primary importance to the argument (cf. 4:4).*
 - 3) Ray Stedman, *His vague reference to his source ...is not due to uncertainty but to a desire to stress Scripture as speaking, not a mere human author...*
 - b. God's concern for mankind (6b), ***What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him?***
 - 1) H. D. M. Spence, *In the psalm this exclamation comes after a contemplation of the starry heavens, which had impressed the psalmist's mind with a sense of God's transcendent glory. In contrast with this glory, man's insignificance and unworthiness occur to him, as they have similarly occurred to many; but, at the same time, he thought of the high position assigned to man in the account of the creation, on which position he next enlarges.*
 - 2) William L. Lane, *The description corresponds to the divine intention expressed in Gen 1:26-28. Created in God's image, humans were entrusted with the cultural mandate to subdue the earth and to put everything in subjection to themselves.*
 - 3) R. Kent Hughes, *The Psalmist could see only a hint of the vastness and glory of the universe. But through modern technology we "see" our planet spinning around our sun, which is only one of a hundred thousand million suns in our galaxy, which is only one of a hundred thousand million galaxies. No wonder the astonished exclamation, "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"*
 - 4) *son of man*
 - 1] It should remind us of Jesus whose preferred title was *Son of Man*.
 - 2] This passage was generally assigned to mankind with specific fulfillment in the Messiah.
 - 3] Donald Hagner, *If the words were meant originally to apply to human beings, they find their fullest realization in the one who is preeminently human, who reveals humanity as humanity was meant to be.*
 - c. The temporary subordination of mankind to angels (7a), ***You made him for a little while lower than the angels;***
 - 1) Raymond Brown, *...he was intended to be a creature of special privilege, only 'for a little while lower than the angels' (2:7).*
 - 2) R. Kent Hughes, *Puny man is only lower than the angels in that man is in a corporal body and the angels are incorporeal. Man is therefore limited in a way angels are not and has lesser power. But man is not lower spiritually or in importance. What an astounding position for such temporary specks as us!*
 - 3) Donald Hagner, *What humanity once had, but lost, has now been gained by the one who became a human being for that very purpose.*
 - d. The dominion of mankind over everything (7b-8a), ***you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet.***
 - 1) *crowned with glory and honor*
 - a) William L. Lane, *Remembered and cared for by the Lord, created a little less than a heavenly being, crowned with glory and honor, human beings had been given the status of creature-sovereign with responsibility for the ordering of the creation for God.*
 - b) Raymond Brown, *...he was meant to be a creature of unique dignity, the treasured aspect of God's creation, 'crowned ... with glory and honour' (2:7), the recipient of God's special favour.*

- 2) *putting everything in subjection*
 - a) William L. Lane, *Created in God's image, humans were entrusted with the cultural mandate to subdue the earth and to put everything in subjection to themselves.*
 - b) Raymond Brown, *He was, furthermore, marked out initially as a creature of unrivaled dominion, with all the created order under his control, 'everything in subjection under his feet' (2:8).*
 - c) R. Kent Hughes, *God's ultimate intention is to have his Kingdom ruled by redeemed men and women. Those "insignificant" people in that harried house-church, a minuscule dot in the Roman Empire, were going to rule everything!*

3) Comments

- a) William L. Lane, *That goal (subjection) had been frustrated by sin and death, but the sense of wonder expressed by the psalmist indicates that it had not been forgotten. The recital and celebration of the divine intention awakened the expectation that all that had been placed under human dominion at the time of the creation would yet be subject to humanity in the world to come...*
- b) William Barclay, *In this passage, there are three basic ideas. (1) God created men and women only a little less than himself, to have control over all things. (2) Through their sin, they entered into defeat instead of control. (3) Into this state of defeat came Jesus Christ in order that by his life and death and glory he might make men and women what they were meant to be.*
- c) Psalm 8 expresses God's intended purpose for mankind, to rule God's created order. Due to the fall of mankind, there has been a lapse in mankind's rule. Verses 6-8a picture man as he was supposed to be with a transition in verse 8b-9 to what he will be based on the work of the Son of Man.
- d) Zane Hodges, *Whatever might have been the general appropriateness of Psalm 8 to man's current standing in the world, in the view of the writer those words do not now describe the actual state of affairs.*

C. The dominion of Jesus is seen by faith (8b-9)

1. Dominion will be absolute (8b), ***Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control.***

- a. The writer now emphasizes his point in 8a by declaring nothing is outside mankind's control. It is a position postponed due to sin.
- b. Douglas Mangum, *The psalm highlights the exalted place of humanity, and here the author of Hebrews extrapolates this to highlight the exaltation and glorification of the divine Son of Man, Jesus. His authority is comprehensive, with nothing outside the realm of his rule. Yet, in his incarnation we do not fully perceive his sovereign rule.*
- c. Warren Wiersbe, *When our Lord was here on earth, He exercised that lost dominion. He had dominion over the fish (see Matt. 17:24-27; Luke 5:1-11; John 21:1-11), over the fowl (Luke 22:34, 60), and over the wild beasts (Mark 1:12-13), and the domesticated beasts (Mark 11:1-7). As the last Adam (1 Cor. 15:45), Jesus Christ regained man's lost dominion. Today, everything is under His feet (Eph. 1:20-23).*
- d. Thomas Constable, *Even though believers do not yet see Jesus glorified on earth, we do see Him with the eye of faith glorified in heaven.*

2. Subjection of all things is not now a reality (8c), ***At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.***

- a. Warren Wiersbe, *... we have a serious problem here, for it is obvious that man today is not exercising dominion over creation. Certainly man cannot control the fish, fowl, or animals. In fact, man has a hard time controlling himself!*
- b. Raymond Brown, *...this is not man as we now see him. From our observations we see him despising God's favour, abusing his privileges, ignoring his dignity and, through sin, limited in his dominion. Man is certainly not as he should be.*
- c. William L. Lane, *The recognition of the present unfilled state of affairs prepares him to see that the promised subjection has reference not to humankind in general (v 8) but to Jesus (v 9), whom God has appointed "heir of everything (1:2).*
- d. R. Kent Hughes, *Adam sinned, and as a consequence his God-given dominion became twisted. Man's rule over creation has through the centuries become an ecological disaster. His reign over the animal world is superficial. He achieves it by intimidation: "Obey me, or I'll eat you or wear you!" And sometimes he himself has been the feast. The problem is, he cannot rule over himself, let alone others.*
- e. G. K. Chesterton, *whatever else is or is not true, this one thing is certain: we are not what we were meant to be.*
- f. Thomas Constable, *The time when all things now under His authority will bow to that authority awaits His return to earth at His second advent and the judgments that will follow His coming.*

3. Dominion by Jesus may be seen by faith in His substitutionary atonement (9), *But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*
 - a. Introductory notes
 - 1) Donald Hagner, ...*he* (the writer of Hebrews) *presents an interpretation of the quotation, utilizing specific words drawn from the quotation itself. The result may fairly be described as a Christian commentary (i.e., seen from the perspective of the fulfillment brought by Christ) on the passage that enables the author to drive home his point and thereby also to demonstrate the continuity he finds between old and new.*
 - 2) Charles Spurgeon, *The text begins with “but,” because it refers to some things which we do not yet see, which are the objects of strong desire.*
 - 3) James Moffatt, *V. 9 answers the question why Jesus was lowered and exalted—it was for the sake of mankind.*
 - 4) William L. Lane, *The three lines reproduced by the writer combine to form a confession of faith that celebrates the three successive moments in the drama of redemption, i.e., the incarnation, the exaltation, and the final victory of Jesus, the first pertaining to the past, the second to the present, and the third to the future.*
 - b. *we see him...namely Jesus*
 - 1) Donald Hagner, *This is the first mention of the personal name Jesus, which is used deliberately here to focus attention upon his humanity.*
 - 2) William L. Lane, *There is a profound note of anticipation in the OT teaching about humanity. The words of the psalmist look forward into the future, and that future is inextricably bound up with the person and work of Jesus.*
 - 3) R. K. Hughes, *What about God’s intention? Will man’s alleged significance ever be achieved? The answer is a resounding “Yes!” that echoes for all eternity...Not only is God’s original intention achieved, but his ultimate intention is achieved in Christ, the second Adam.*
 - 4) Raymond Brown, *Although sin has restricted man’s dominion in creation, it has not entirely obliterated it. Man’s qualified mastery over created things indicates that in God’s purpose we have a divinely given responsibility towards creation...Man is certainly not remotely like the ideal humanity portrayed by the psalmist, but Jesus has come into the world to show us what man is like in God’s original purpose and what man can be through Christ’s effective work.*
 - 5) We are to see Jesus not only as our Redeemer from sin but our Restorer to rule over creation.
 - c. *who for a little while was made lower than angels*
 - 1) As noted in verse 7, mankind was made lower than angels.
 - 2) In this verse, Jesus is made lower than angels in His humanity. The deity of the Son was joined with humanity, one person in two natures.
 - 3) Ray Stedman, *There is the whole wonder of the Incarnation; in John’s phrasing, “the Word became flesh and lived for a while among us.”*
 - 4) William L. Lane, *His condescension to be made for a brief while ‘lower than the angels’ set in motion a sequence of events in which abasement and humiliation were the necessary prelude to exaltation.*
 - 5) Donald Hagner, *It is the incarnation that makes Jesus temporarily lower than the angels, and the purpose of the incarnation is to make possible his death on behalf of all, for everyone.*
 - d. *crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death*
 - 1) Complimentary verses from the Apostle Paul
 - a) Philippians 2:8-10, *And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,*
 - b) Romans 5:17, *For if, because of one man’s trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.*
 - 2) Ray Stedman, *...he achieved as a human being the position intended for us in the beginning: the being who was to be closest to God, higher than any angel, and in authority over all things!*
 - 3) Douglas Mangum, *... it is through his suffering and death that he has been crowned with glory and honor.*

- e. *so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*
- 1) Donald Hagner, *The incarnation and its goal, the cross, are the glorious expression of the grace of God, God's free mercy and favor.*
 - 2) Ray Stedman, *To taste death does not simply mean to die, but to experience death in its full horror and humiliation. He comes under the penalty of sin in order that he might remove it. The emphasis here is that what Jesus did through his death and exaltation was for everyone. Salvation is now open to all; no one who comes to Jesus will ever be refused.*
 - 3) William Barclay, *The writer to the Hebrews sees in Christ the one who by his sufferings and his glory can make us what we were meant to be and what, without him, we could never be.*
 - 4) Warren Wiersbe, *Jesus Christ became man that He might suffer and die for man's sin and restore the dominion that was lost because of sin.*

CONCLUSION

- William L. Lane, *In Jesus we see exhibited humanity's true vocation. In an extraordinary way he fulfills God's design for all creation and displays what had always been intended for all humankind, according to Ps 8...In Jesus the hearers are to find the pledge of their own entrance into the imperial destiny intended by God for them.*
- Donald Hagner, *The full humanity of the Son, therefore, involves the greatest of advantages, including the superiority of the Son to angels as the one who makes salvation possible by fulfilling the will of God in suffering and death.*
- Charles Spurgeon, *Oh, how glorious it is to realize our position in Christ, and to see how He has lifted us up, not merely to the place from which the first Adam fell, but He has made us stand so securely there that we shall not again descend among the ruins of the Fall! Glory be to His holy name!*