

2. The Bible: God's Written Word

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[0 : 0 0] In the Bibles, please, to page 1001. We're going to be particularly looking at Hebrews 1, verses 5 to 14 today. Last week we looked at verses 1 to 4, but we're going to read the whole chapter so we can place verses 5 to 14 in context.

Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets. 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.

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels, as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

For which of the angels did God ever say, You are my Son, today I have begotten you. Or again I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, Let all God's angels worship him.

Of the angels, he says, he makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire. But of the Son, he says, Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.

[1 : 3 2] The scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness. Therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.

And you, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain. They will all wear out like a garment, 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. 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?

Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation? This is the word of the Lord, and may he bless it to us.

The Bible, God's written word. Now, at first sight, it seems very odd that we should come to this book to listen to the voice of God.

[2 : 4 1] After all, it is a very old book. The most recent part is nearly 2,000 years old, and the older parts of it almost another 2,000 years before that.

Medical students, I imagine, do not use 2,000-year-old textbooks, and perhaps even not even 50-year-old textbooks. I imagine engineering students don't go back to read the works of the Greeks on hydraulic engineering.

So why should we take this ancient book as the word of God for the present day? Think about it for a moment, though. Shakespeare is not self-evidently inferior to play for today.

Beethoven is not self-evidently inferior to the latest tune. You see what I'm saying? That simply because something is old doesn't mean it's irrelevant, doesn't mean it's nothing to say to us today.

And in the case of Shakespeare and Beethoven, we're talking about the continuing value, the continuing impact of their works. But here we are saying a bit more. We are saying that this is the word of God, which brings the living word, Christ Jesus, before us.

[3 : 57] When we listen to this word, we listen to the voice of God. Theologian Jim Packer says, when the Bible speaks, God speaks. This is the voice of God.

And what is the written word saying to us? It's saying to us that everything that God is, everything that God does, everything about God is to be found in the living word, Jesus Christ.

Now you see the connection between them. We were not alive during the earthly life of Jesus Christ. We did not stand at the manger in Bethlehem. We were not at the cross of Calvary.

We were not at the empty tomb. We didn't see him ascend into heaven. And therefore, if we are going to know him, if we are going to have a true word about him, we must read this word, the written word, which fully and faithfully points to him.

But interestingly, you must have noticed in this passage, our author is saying, Jesus is greater, far greater than angels. Difficult to imagine a modern preacher or writer saying to his audience or to his readership.

[5 : 08] The reason Jesus Christ deserves your allegiance, the reason you must listen to him, is because he is greater than angels. And the reason for that is angels have fared very badly throughout the history of the Christian church.

If you go down to mind, body and spirit in Borders or up to Waterstones, you'll find books on angels, but you'll find them in dubious company, along with books on tarot cards, on witchcraft and other assorted hocus pocus.

In other words, angels are regarded simply as another example of new agey thinking, of extra body experiences and extraterrestrial experiences.

But angels in the Bible are God's agents, God's agents in the whole government of the universe. Many years ago, Billy Graham wrote a book about angels, which he called God's secret agents.

That's a very good title, because that's exactly what they are. Verse 14, Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

[6 : 14] The particular point here is this. We're told elsewhere, for example, in Galatians, that angels were the mediators, the intermediaries in giving the law, giving the word of God.

But we've not to have faith in them. It's only the unique and true Son of God we must trust. And Hebrews is saying, as indeed the whole of the New Testament says, that the Old Testament, as well as the New Testament, is the word about Jesus Christ.

What's the subject of the Old Testament? It is the person and work of Jesus Christ, the same as the New Testament. So what is God saying to us in this passage?

What is the Bible saying about Christ? Three things briefly. Verse 5, To which of the angels did God ever say, You are my Son, Today I have begotten you, or again I will be to him a father, he shall be to me a son, when he brings the firstborn into the world.

First thing he's saying is, Jesus Christ was before time, but he came into time. He comes from outside, but he comes right to where we are to show us God.

[7 : 29] Whereas God doesn't just stay in heaven, so to speak, distant from us, but comes right down to speak to us. He takes flesh. He becomes one of us. He takes a body.

And the background of this is, the quotation is from Psalm 2, where God says that he is powerful over the warring nations, and that they will be overwhelmed by his anointed king.

I have set my king on my holy hill of Zion. And those are two things. First of all, he is begotten. Today I have begotten you. Now, that's not a word that's easy to explain.

Remember the Christmas carol, very God, begotten, not created. But the point that's being made is that Jesus Christ, unlike the angels, is not a creature.

That he is the creator himself come into the world. See, if an angel came into the world, if God had simply sent an angel and prophets, which he did, then we would never be absolutely certain we are in contact with God.

[8 : 34] But God comes himself in the person of his Son. And because of that, our earthly problems have a solution.

See, if we try to solve our earthly problems simply by earthly means, simply by political, social, economic means, all of these are all right in their own place, we cannot solve them.

It's someone who comes from outside, into time and space, who died and rose again and ascended into heaven. And when I'll be to my Father and he shall be to me a Son.

You see, in other words, it's not in angels we have confidence. Because this kind of New Age thinking that you get in these kind of books I've mentioned, simply see angels as independent spiritual beings who offer dubious experiences, offer enlightenment, offer ways of overcoming our humanity.

They are great and glorious servants of God, but in comparison with Christ, they have no status at all. You see, we may not be in armed rebellion like these.

[9 : 45] In Psalm 2, the pictures of armed rebellion, the kings marshalling themselves around Jerusalem. But there is a basic rebellion in all our hearts. We don't want to crown Christ as king in our lives.

That's why so many people turn to these other kinds of experiences. Those kinds of experiences that offer us instant gratification, offer us instant satisfaction, without the inconvenient necessity of repenting and having faith and changing our lives.

So the first thing the Bible tells us, the first thing the written word tells us about the living word, is that he is outside of time, but came into time.

And that's why, of course, he is the solution to our problems. Second thing it tells us in verses 7 to 9, is that he is the king. Angels are described as winds and ministers, ministers, that's the ministering spirits, as a flame of fire.

But in verse 8, of the sun he says, your throne, O God, is forever and ever. Now, that could not be addressed to any human being, or indeed to any angel.

[10 : 58] Psalm 45, from which these words come, is an ode, a song, at a royal wedding. And king is not named, but it is a royal wedding. But even, seeing the kings as representatives of God as they were, there is no conceivable way that these words could be addressed to a human being.

Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. Now, think about it in this way. What kind of throne is it? That's the point, isn't it?

Because many of the thrones then, and many of the thrones and regimes now, are marked not by uprightness and so on.

They're marked by oppression. They're marked by cruelty. They're marked by greed and exploitation. This throne is different. Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.

The scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. It's not power-hungry. It's not exploitative. It's not greedy. It is righteousness and justice.

[12 : 04] See, that's why so often in the Old Testament, when the writers talk about judgment and the coming of God in judgment, they see it as something to rejoice in. Psalm 98, Shout for joy to the Lord, the King.

Let the sea resound, the world and all who live in it. And why is the sea to resound and the world to rejoice? For he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness.

Now, we are blessed in this country to live in a fairly stable society where there is a fair amount of justice. But over and over again, we come across terrible miscarriages of justice.

That man who was released recently after serving 27 years in prison for a crime he did not commit. nothing is awful. There is no way anyone can make up to that man for those 27 lost years.

But in the kingdom to come, there will be perfect justice. There will be no miscarriages of justice. There will be no unfairness. There will be no exploitation. There will be no, there will be nothing that causes sorrow and sadness.

[13 : 17] And that is why people rejoice, why the psalmist rejoices in the coming to judgment. judgment. Now judgment is a terrifying thing as well. It's a frightening thing.

But ultimately, if there's no judgment, there isn't going to be a kingdom of righteousness and a kingdom of peace and a kingdom of justice. If God does not return to judge the earth, then the kind of mixture of exploitation, justice, injustice, will continue forever.

So you see how this is giving us hope for the future. And that's the third thing the author has to say. Not only did he come from outside, come into this world to show us God, not only is he king, but he is lord of the future.

That's verses 10 to 14. You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth and the beginning of the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain.

In other words, he's not just the creator. We saw that last week. He upholds the universe by the word of his power. He is the one who will bring the universe to a glorious, fitting conclusion.

[14 : 30] These words come from Psalm 102. In Psalm 102, the psalmist is deeply depressed. He feels his life has run into the sand. He feels there's nothing to look forward to, nowhere to hope.

And then he remembers the creator. He remembers that his help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. See, if we believe in a creator, and if we believe in the creator who has revealed himself in Jesus Christ, then we cannot possibly believe he's going to leave the work unfinished.

Many of us start projects and never finish them. All over the country there are scattered those buildings which we call follies, which people began to build. There's one on Carlton Hill in Edinburgh, which is supposed to look like the Parthenon in Athens.

But it was unfinished. And there are many throughout the country. But God, when he begins a work, completes it. Because God has created a universe, he is going to bring it to a glorious conclusion.

Beyond this fleeting life, they will perish. They will all wear out like a garment, like a robe. You will roll them up. Now, when somebody throws away their old clothes, that doesn't mean they're dying, does it?

[15 : 42] Probably they're in good health and they need new clothes. Similarly, when God, as it were, throws away the old robe, that is the old creation, puts on the new one, which is the new creation, that is the hope against which we place our fleeting life.

Your years will have no end. Think about it this way. The overwhelming majority of the Lord's people have gone to be with him. When you think of all the people of faith throughout the Old Testament and throughout the since then, which Hebrews 11 speaks about.

And we don't know when Christ will return, but by then, even more people will have gone to be with him. So the hope of those still alive is not, we're not looking to a dismal end in death, we're looking beyond death.

because Christ is the Lord of the future. And don't imagine that's something we don't have in the Old Testament. Many people will tell you there's no hope of life after death in the Old Testament.

But over and over again, even before the resurrection of Jesus, there are glimpses into a world beyond. There are signs, there are pictures that the world is, that the world to come exists.

[17 : 02] After all, people did believe in the living God. Psalm 139, even bed in Sheol, the other world, you will find me there and you will receive me into glory.

Your right hand will lead me and you will receive me into glory. And later on in the letter, the author is going to sum up this message by saying, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday and today and forever.

how do we keep going until the kingdom comes? This is the point of verse 14. It's not just a little afterthought. Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

We are not to worship angels. We are not to give them a greater place than they deserve. On the other hand, we have not to do what often happens and simply ignore them. They are part of God's gracious provision to help us on our journey towards heaven.

Dear Christian, how often do you thank God for the ministry of angels? You are probably not even aware of it. But this is one of God's gracious gifts.

[18 : 14] The ministering spirits sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation. In other words, their ministry isn't just to run the Milky Way, so to speak.

But they actually care for you and me in our problems, in our circumstances. And as we wait for the coming of the kingdom, God sends his angels to protect us and to help us on that journey.

So two things as we finish. If we truly want to hear what God is saying through his living word, Jesus Christ, we need to hear what he is saying in the Old Testament.

If we ignore the Old Testament, we will have an incomplete picture of Jesus Christ. The whole Bible is about him. On the Emmaus Road, Jesus said, beginning with Moses and all the prophets, revealed to them in the scriptures things about himself.

As Timothy Dudley Smith says in that hymn, we sang, one of the things that happened was their hearts burned, finding our hearts within us burning when as of old his voice is heard.

[19 : 22] that's the first thing. We need to listen to what God is saying. And we need to thank and praise God that he has given us that kind of revelation to help us.

If you're not a Christian, if you're exploring, then remember that God has given us a word. He's not left us simply to try and reason and puzzle and grope our way towards him.

God has spoken in those last days by his Son. If we want to know what God is saying in those last days by his Son, then please begin not at Matthew 1, verse 1, but at Genesis 1, verse 1.

Amen. Let's pray. Father, we thank you for the scriptures. We thank you that Christ is their great theme and subject.

We thank you for the gracious Holy Spirit who inspired these words and who now comes to help us to understand them. Let's help us now as we go about our business, give to us confidence in that word, make our hearts and our minds and our wills respond to what you have to say to us.

[20 : 36] May we know indeed the truth that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. In his name. Amen.