A Brief Primer on Angelology

Hebrews 1:5-14

March 1, 2026

I want to welcome you back as we return to our study of Hebrews. We have covered the introductory section, verses 1 to 4, and we are now looking at the first argument that the pastor makes here in Hebrews that Christ is superior to all of God's servants. The pastor starts in his argument that Christ is superior to all God's servants by speaking of Christ's superiority over the angels in chapter 1, verse 5 all the way through chapter 2, verse 18.

So basically chapter 1 and 2 and then he moves on to argue for the superiority of Christ over human servants. So he starts with Moses the lawgiver in chapter 3 verses 1 through 19. And then Joshua you could call the rest giver, he really is an extension of Moses ministry. So some outlines, we'll see that together under Christ's superior to Moses, but we also see Joshua singled out there. He is the one who gives rest. His name means salvation or the salvation of Yahweh and that's in chapter

4, verses 1 to 13. First, though, the pastor starts with Christ's superiority over the angels. This is a

subject that he broaches in the final verse of the introductory section. So follow along as I read those opening verses. "God, having spoken long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days, spoke to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds, Who is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power; who, having accomplished cleansing for sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they.

So this is an ethnically Jewish congregation of Christians. So why does he begin here with Christ's superiority over angels? What's he addressing? What's maybe the problem he's addressing? Why the angels? Some suppose in Jewish rabbinic angelology, which back in that day the Jewish rabbis, they could pontificate on absolutely anything, any detail in scripture. But certainly, developing a complex system and a hierarchy of angels is something that was very developed in Jewish rabbinical teaching.

And some suppose that because of that Jewish rabbinic angelology, a developed complex system, it kind of led to worship of angels in a fashion like what we find in Colossians.

You know, we've said that Hebrews is written by a pastor to his congregation, probably a congregation in Rome and a house church. Jewish Christians, there are some commentators who actually believe the Lycus Valley and Colossae and the cities of the Lycus Valley was the destination of Hebrews, and that this is actually dealing with something very similar to what we find in Colossians, the worship of angels.

For a number of reasons, I don't see it that way, but one of the things we need to understand about rabbinical teaching is that it was always careful to guard against any undue elevation of angels to the level of deity or even close to God. They maintained the deity of God and the worship of God is exclusive. There may have been some heretical sects here and there, but not generally in rabbinic teaching.

There wasn't any evidence of angel worship among Jews per se. But Philip Hughes, a very good commentator, fine commentator, he thinks that the author's argument addresses a tendency among these Hebrew Christians, quote, "to view with

favor teaching similar to those held by the Dead Sea sect at that time."

You know, in Judea there's the Dead Sea, and over near that area where you find the Dead Sea Scrolls, there was a group of Jews, a sectarian group called the Essenes. Usually we think of the Pharisees, the Sadducees, a third group was the Jewish Essenes, a very sectarian group, more conservative even than the Pharisees. They thought the Pharisees were compromisers, but the Essenes lived around the Dead Sea. Hughes goes on to explain this.

He says, "The eschatological perspective envisaged the introduction of a hierarchical structure with two messianic figures, of whom the kingly, the kingly Messiah, the kingly would be subordinate to the priestly Messiah, and both of whom would be subordinate to the Archangel Michael, thus assigning supremacy to an angelic being in the expected kingdom." End Quote.

You have to understand that this view, their view of the coming Messiah, was that he was just a man. That's how they interpreted the Old Testament. They didn't view him as the God man, as incarnation has made clear, but that was their view, that there would be a kingly Messiah subordinate to the priestly

Messiah, both of them doing their ministry under the Archangel Michael.

So Philip Hughes believes this background may explain the author's opening argument here and need to elevate the son over the angels for any of those in this congregation influenced by this sect of Essene Jews who live near the Dead Sea. Based on our examination of this book, its background, the author recipients their location, the occasion of the epistle.

I don't, I don't believe that the Essene view of angels was highly influential on a congregation of Hebrew Christians living in Rome, that seems to be pretty remote and a tenuous connection. I also don't think confronting the worship of angels is in view here either, because of the way he speaks and writes to them. They don't seem to have a false deity problem. I don't think that's the issue.

A better view, it's found in the context actually, which treats the angels and Moses as these elevated superior servants of God, and that there's a power then for the pastor to demonstrate the exaltation of Christ by comparison and contrast with God's greatest servants. One Commentator Gareth Cockrell writes, "As ancient orators praised a ruler by comparing him

with the great rulers of the past. So the pastor magnifies the son by comparison with the angels."

In view of the angelic involvement in the giving of the law, we can see in chapter 2 verse 2, there's an indication of that. Acts 7:53, Stephen refers to the involvement of angels in giving the law. Galatians 3:19 Paul refers to it there too. But in view of the angelic involvement in giving the law ruling over the nation's, we'll read a little bit later out of Daniel; ruling over the forces of nature, the plagues of Egypt were thought to come through the power of angels also we can read that in Deuteronomy 32:8 and 9, Daniel 4, Daniel 10.

All those reasons they are superior servants, high level, supreme and so, Cockrell writes this, "Comparison with the angels was the most effective way of substantiating the supremacy of the Son and His identity with God as affirmed in chapter 1, verses 1 to 4, and thus of securing obedience to God's revelation in Him in chapter 2, verses 1 to 4."

So this brings us really to the opening argument in verses 5 through 14, that the son is superior to the angels. And I want to help us to appreciate the pastor's argument here. I want to try to backfill some things that we don't really appreciate or think about or ponder. We do not have a highly developed,

sophisticated view of hierarchy of angels in our thinking. We don't have angel charts at home. We may have dispensational eschatology charts, but there are no angel charts of who's superior to who in our homes. We don't think like that. They did.

They did have a lot of understanding, a lot more understanding of angels than we do. And so I want to demonstrate the power of his argument for us modern readers. Important for us to survey this angelology just briefly, because we are raised in our time, we are raised and have been raised for a couple centuries now as secular modern thinkers steeped in Enlightenment thinking.

The German liberal theologian Rudolf Bultmann, he sums up the sentiment that comes out of the Enlightenment. He says this quote, "We cannot use electric lights and radios, and in the event of an illness avail ourselves of modern medicinal and clinical means, and at the same time believe in the spirit and wonder world of the New Testament."

He was a theologian heavily influential on the interpretation of the New Testament in his time. He died in 1976, but he was very influential. Theologian Rudolf Bultmann engaged on what he called the demythologizing of the Bible and

really what that meant, he wanted to extract all the myth out of it, so we could get down to the basic facts because he thought that that was more powerful and especially in a modern time that rejected all of that anyway.

So he said let's go back through the Bible and demythologize it. So he denied miracles, he denied its spiritual elements, including angels and demons. He was really a modern day Sadducee and his assumptions have become modern assumptions. So we are all a bunch of Sadducees in our thinking now, and we need to kind of go back and fight our way toward the belief in the Bible.

All these modern assumptions are just that really, assumptions are not really based in fact. They're not based on any observation, not any deduction from first principles. These are just bare assertions coming from Bultmann and his ilk. But we need to get back to reality and then summarize biblical teaching on angels.

I'm just going to run through some teaching on angels and ask and answer some questions here. First let's ask what are angels? What are they? What are the characteristics of or what is the nature of the angelic essence? An angel is a pure spirit, meaning non corporeal. So no body, doesn't have a material

nature or essence. Each angel is a unique being with his own personal consciousness, his own personality.

You can say each angel is an individual person. They have names, Gabriel, Michael, some of them we know. Let me give you five points here number one: Angels are immortal spirits. They're immortal spirits. Immortal means they live forever, but it doesn't mean they're eternal. Angels, like us, had a beginning, a starting point. They're undying in their essence, just as we are. Once a human soul is created, we live on forever. We have a starting point. We're not eternal. We don't have immortality in us as God does. But we are immortal because we live on forever.

Number two: Angels are powerful spirits. They're not omnipotent. They're not all powerful. They have limitations on their power, as we'll see a little bit later. Very powerful though. Number three: Angels are spatially located spirits. What I mean by that is though they are spiritual and visible, they don't have a body. But at the same time, they're not omnipresent. They are in one place at one time. They live with a creaturely finitude. They're not infinite like God. They're not omnipresent like God.

If you want to put a finger in Hebrews and turn back to Daniel, Daniel chapter 10, you can see in some of Gabriel's interaction with Daniel in response to his prayer. You can see some very interesting asides. You know, Gabriel speaks to Daniel as if, well, of course, he's just going to get this. This is kind of what I'm about, what's going on in my life, and we're kind of reading into it.

Say, tell us more man, this is amazing. Daniel chapter 10, verse 12, "He said to me, 'Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you gave your heart to understand this and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words." Okay. In what sense did he come? He was someplace else. And now he has come.

Then he goes on, "But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was standing against me for twenty-one days; and then behold, Michael, one of the chief Princes, came to help me." Uh, "for now I had been left there with the kings of Persia." Wow, this is interesting, isn't it? So there's some kind of angelic battle, some kind of back and forth.

"Prince of the kingdom of Persia standing against me, twenty-one days." And I needed some help. So I need a more powerful angel. What's going on here, right? He's just talking

to Daniel, like they're just, they're just shooting the breeze, talking about what's going on. What's going on in your life? Well, here's what's going on in mine.

And we're like, man, tell us more. He says in verse 14, "Now I've come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in the last days, for the vision pertains to the days yet future." So he's serving Daniel in answer to his prayer. Skip down to verse 20. "He said, 'Do you know why I came to you?" Then he goes on to say, "but I shall now return to fight against the prince of Persia." We know this isn't a human prince, because if he goes to fight the prince of Persia, he arrives, it's over, he comes back, right? This is not a human prince.

This is a demonic prince. "I return to fight against the prince of Persia; so I'm going forth and behold, the prince of Greece is about to come." I'm getting attacked. "However, I will tell you what is inscribed in the writings of truth. Now, there is no one who exerts strength with me against these forces except Michael your prince." Just some things to chew on with regard to their power, their limitation of power, their spatial presence, their being in one place and then being in another place and then going back to that place, right?

Let's set that aside for a minute and talk about number four: Angels are intellectual spirits. They're intellectual spirits, they're highly intelligent, they're not omniscient. They don't know all things, but they have developed a great amount of wisdom by virtue of their ability to observe and to learn and to gain knowledge and to act in wisdom, and then to apply that knowledge effectively. Demons use it for malevolent purposes, to tempt us and try us and all that. Angels use their knowledge effectively to serve.

Number five: Not only are they intellectual spirits, but they're curious spirits. They observe humanity. 1 Corinthians 11, verse 10 says, they observe our worship services. They're present in and among us as we're worshiping the Lord. They're rejoicing to see our good order and how we conduct ourselves in submission to authority and proper roles and all those things in the church.

Says in 1 Peter 1:12. They seek to know and understand things they don't know and understand, like things pertaining to salvation. They're curious, looking into our salvation, our redemption, because they don't share in humanity, but they can observe it. Fascinating.

Okay, so that's just a little bit about what are angels? Secondly, how does an angel, a spiritual, immaterial being, perceive the physical, material world? How do they perceive the material world? Because we know that they show up in the material world. Sometimes they seem to materialize in the material world. So how do they perceive it?

Angels obviously have an experience of consciousness that differs from ours because angels have no bodies, they have no sensory perception, so no seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling, that means that they don't interact with the world like we do. Everything we know we take in through our senses because we are composite beings of flesh and spirit, not angels.

So how do they interact? They don't interact with the world like we do. They are portrayed in scripture at times as having bodies, and when they do, it's the body of a man, and it's the body of a glorious and beautiful and powerful man. But as spirits, they have no bodies. They can't imagine, sense perception. They have no experience or memory of sense perception. They possess no sensory longings or passions. They're not affected physically or sensually as we are. They show up, they eat, they converse, they do things with bodies. And how do they know how to do all that?

Well, as I said, they're astute observers of humanity. They've been studying us. They know what we do. So on the one hand, angels aren't subject to hunger or thirst, weakness, weariness, which may seem like a positive, but on the other hand, angels don't experience or sense the physical manifestations of God's glory in creation like we do. They have limitations.

One of their limitations is they're not human. They are angelic. They don't get the elevated experience that we do as being both spiritual and corporeal, both body and spirit. They have no pleasures of marriage, procreation, family, no physical affection, all the things that we enjoy.

Third, if angels don't perceive the physical world like we do, how then do they speak to each other? Remember in Isaiah 6, they were called out to one another. Holy, holy, holy. So they do speak to each other, but not like we do. They communicate spiritually, spirit to spirit. They don't have to depend on generating or receiving physical sound waves like we do. They don't have to amplify sound waves through microphones like I do.

They are able to convey thoughts spirit to spirit. We don't know how they do this, but they do mind to mind. They are able to summon one another, communicate with one another, know each

other's plans and intentions, know where Michael's going to be and Gabriel's going to be, able to communicate.

Fourth: If angels are spiritual immaterial beings, well then how do they move through the physical material world? As spiritual beings, angels are part of a higher order of reality which is supra-physical, not subject to physical laws or spatial limitations. They do, however, interact in the material world. They enter into it, exert influence on it, as been mentioned.

We see in the judgments of Exodus, as we will later see in the judgments of Revelation, but again, if angels have no bodies, how can they be in any particular place, as is depicted in Scripture; where they're stationed in Eden, where they are visiting Abraham, or then visiting Sodom and Gomorrah, or ascending and descending on Jacob's ladder, or caring for Jesus in the wilderness of temptation or in the Garden of Gethsemane?

How are they there doing things? How is Gabriel with Michael, then with Daniel? How is he with Mary, Joseph, then the shepherds? Well, here's where we can appreciate some help. The thinking of a certain teacher known as the Angelic Doctor. He's not a doctor for angels. The Angelic Doctor is Thomas Aquinas. Thomas Aquinas, a medieval scholastic theologian and lots of good in Thomas Aquinas.

There's actually kind of a resurgence of interest in Thomas Aquinas, and it seems that the more interested people are in Thomas Aquinas, the more they become Catholics. So I will just warn you, don't go all the way down the road with Thomas Aquinas. But there's a lot to learn from him as well.

He's known as the Angelic Doctor, because he's so helpfully observed and reflected on and taught on angels, even if some of his teaching did drift towards speculation. Like all medieval scholastic scholars, teachers, he sought to make very careful distinctions. He required very careful definitions when he taught, and so it's sometimes tedious to read through Aquinas, but if you can follow it, you'll find yourself helped.

Aquinas said that a being or a thing can be in a place in two ways. Okay, so here's a distinction he's making. Being in a place can happen in two ways. Number one, by being contained in a place as a physical body is like my body right here. I'm contained here. I'm stuck here until my body wants to move me over there, and then I'll be stuck over there until my body moves it into another place.

Angels not like that. So you can be in a place by being contained in a place like your physical body is stuck in that place. You're there. Or number two, you can be in a place by

influencing the place, as a causal force upon the place. This is how an angel is somewhere and not somewhere else, by exerting a causal influence and force upon that place.

So by God's design, angels can influence physical material entities that occupy particular physical material places at particular times. So for example, an angel can be in Egypt, not locked there by a body, but influencing there the physical material realities of humans in Egypt; so sending plagues, killing firstborns.

An angel can be in a jail cell with Peter exerting an influence on him, walking up and striking him on the side, or breaking him out of prison by opening locked gates. So somehow he can affect those things, those material realities, exerting an influence. Okay, so if they're not contained in places, but they exert influence on places. This brings up some related questions.

Fifth: question, can angels be in several places at once? Do they have omnipresence or are they limited in their location? Aquinas says no, they do not have omnipresence. He reasons from the nature of what it is to be a creature creaturely limitation. Question 52, Article 2. He says, "An angel's power in nature are

finite, whereas the divine power in essence, which is the universal cause of all things, is infinite.

"Consequently God through his power touches all things, and is not merely present in some places, but is everywhere. Now since the angel's power is finite, it does not extend to all things, but to one determined thing. For whatever is compared with one power must be compared therewith as a one determined thing. Consequently, since all being is compared as one thing to God's universal power, so is one particular being compared as one with the angelic power.

"Hence, since an angel is in a place, by the application of his power to the place, it follows that he is not everywhere, or in several places, but only in one place." Aquinas goes on to say, "it's evident that to be in a place appertains quite differently to a body, to an angel, and to God. For a body is in a place in a circumscribed fashion, since it is measured by the place.

'An angel, however, is not there in a circumscribed fashion, since he is not measured by the place, but definitively, because he is in a place in such a manner that he is not in another. But God is neither circumscriptively nor

definitively there, because he is everywhere." Making distinctions again between men, angels, God, that's helpful.

Next question six: Can more than one Angel be in the same place at the same time or, asked another way, just how many angels can dance on the head of a pin? Some say since angels do not fill a place, because only a body fills a place so that it cannot be empty, therefore angels can be in one place. Bunch of angels in one place at one time dancing on the head of a pin. Aquinas disagrees with that.

He says in Question 52, Article 3, he says, "Because it's impossible for two competing causes to be the causes immediately of one and the same thing. So many angels may be able to dance on the head of a pin, so long as they're not at the one same time the cause of any effect on that pin."

All right, now you know how to answer that puzzling question. I know the answer to how many angels can dance on the head of a pin, one million, but only one of them can affect the cause of that pin. Now clearly we know from scripture angels are able to move from one place to another as Daniel chapter 10 showed, as revelation shows. But how do they do that?

Okay, so one final question, how do angels move? Seventh: How do they move? Do angels have to pass through intervening space when they move from place to place or they just pop from one place to another? How do they do it? Jesus said in Luke 11:24. When the unclean spirit leaves a man, it passes through waterless places, seeking rest and not finding any. It says, "I'll return to my house from which I came." Seems to be he's saying that an angel, in this case a demon, a malevolent angel, moves from one place to another.

Aquinas agrees, but he also makes a distinction. He agrees and he describes the movement in question 53 Article 2. He says, "local motion of an Angel can be continuous. But let me make a distinction and non-continuous. He can move both ways, if it be continuous. The Angel cannot pass from one extreme to another without passing through the middle space."

Okay, so he can't go from here to New York. If he's going to move continuously, he's got to make that whole track. He could do it pretty fast, but he's got to move all the way through that middle space. But he goes on to say if an angel's movement be not continuous, it is possible for him to pass from one extreme to another from here to New York without going

through the middle. Is he speaking out both sides of his mouth? Yeah, I think he is.

Or maybe Aquinas is the original Trekkie. He sees angels as early adopters of teleportation technology. Beam me up and I'm going over there. All joking aside, you remember anything from Luke 24 that portrayed Jesus moving in these ways from Jerusalem to Emmaus? And then he disappeared. And we know he didn't immediately show up in the upper room because they had to run back. And maybe he was hitting another difference, several different spots. Maybe he was walking somewhere else. We don't know.

But he moved both non continuously and continuously. So both ways. Interesting. All right, next question. So if Jesus moved like that, let's say he moved angelically, so to speak, what does that reveal about the improved abilities of the resurrected body? What are the implications, then, for you and me, if his resurrected body is the first fruits of an entire harvest of resurrected bodies?

Why would we assume that there's any difference between his resurrected body and our resurrected body? We got stuff to do. We can't just hang out in the New Jerusalem all day. We got to get down there doing stuff. You got stuff to build, stuff to do,

stuff to plan, stuff to execute, right? But sometimes maybe when we have a little bit extra time, we want the journey, right?

So we'll go from the New Jerusalem down, and we're going to take our time and we're going to move continuously through that space. So these resurrected bodies are fit for purpose. They're fit for the purpose of an eternal existence, a new creation, a time that is going to be very different than the time we live in now.

We have so much more to learn from the angelology of Scripture, but I just want to give you just a taste to help you see angels through these first century Jewish eyes. You need to esteem them more highly in their special, unique, God-given creative properties that are different than ours and understand why the pastor has started the epistle this way and why he's making this argument.

The final word of the introduction in verse 4 becomes the thesis sentence really, for all of chapter 1:5 through 14, the rest of the chapter to say, "That Christ has become as much better than the angels because he's inherited a more excellent name than they," and now he intends to prove it.

Let's follow along with his arguments as we read verse 5 to 14. "For which of the angels did he ever say, 'YOU ARE MY SON, TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU'? And again, 'I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME'? And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says, 'AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP HIM.' And of the angels He says, 'WHO MAKES HIS ANGELS WINDS, AND HIS MINISTERS FLAMING FIRE.' But of the Son He says, 'YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER, AND THE SCEPTER OF UPRIGHTNESS IS THE SCEPTER OF YOUR KINGDOM. YOU HAVE LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS; THEREFORE GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED YOU WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE YOUR COMPANIONS.

"'And, YOU, LORD, IN THE BEGINNING FOUNDED THE EARTH, AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS; THEY WILL PERISH BUT YOU REMAIN; AND THEY ALL WILL WEAR OUT LIKE A GARMENT, AND LIKE A MANTLE YOU WILL ROLL THEM UP; LIKE A GARMENT THEY WILL ALSO BE CHANGED. BUT YOU ARE THE SAME, AND YOUR YEARS WILL NOT COME TO AN END. But to which of the angels has He ever said, 'SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES AS A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET'? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?"

Can't wait to get into that text. We'll have to leave it there for now, but this opening argument ends there. In verse

14. You can kind of see it breaks up into three divisions, you see. Verses 5 and 6 is one division. You see first the question to the angels, which to the angels did he ever say? And then verse 6 he says, "'LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP HIM.'"

And then in verse 13 and 14, that's the third section. So the second section goes from 7 to 12. Verse 13 to 14 is parallel to verses 5 and 6, again addressing the angels at first, "which of the angels has He ever said, 'SIT AT MY RIGHT HAND, UNTIL I PUT YOUR ENEMIES AS A FOOTSTOOL FOR YOUR FEET'? Are they not all ministering spirits, sent to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?"

So you see 5 and 6 and 13 and 14 parallel. Those are two sections first and third and the second sections verses 7 to 12. Seven texts of scripture that he unpacks to show the superiority of Christ over the angels. Much of it a conversation; conversational, showing this inter-trinitarian dialogue between the son and the father and the father and the son. This opening argument ending in verse 14, not only puts angels in their proper place, but the pastor's greater point is to put Christ in his proper place. It's not really to demote the angels, it's really just to show where they are in relation to Christ, that they are creatures and he being the creator.

Let's bow in a word of prayer. Father, we thank you so much for this wonderful plan of redemption. We thank you that it's found all in your son. We thank you for this pastor's concern for his congregation in making this splendid argument that it's going to be our joy to trace the contours of this argument and trace the thinking and the deduction, the logic. But we're so grateful to understand just a little bit more of how the readers, the original readers, this congregation heard this and we need to be a little bit more like them in our biblical understanding.

And so we thank you for the time we've had to examine this angelology very briefly. We pray that you would use it to instruct us as we want to be more intelligent hearers of the Scripture and learners of the Scripture so we can interpret things correctly. We thank you for the son and his perfect mediatorship. We thank you for this book of Hebrews and this argument from start to finish showing the supremacy of Christ over all things. It's in his name we pray. Amen.