

Hebrews 1:4

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

Analysis

Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. This verse concludes the opening Christological declaration (verses 1-3) and introduces the first major section comparing Christ to angels (1:4-2:18). The phrase "being made" (genomenos, γενόμενος) refers not to Christ's essential deity but to His incarnation and exaltation. Through His redemptive work, Christ has been revealed and declared to be "so much better than the angels" (tosoutō kreditton genomen tōn angelōn, τοσούτῳ κρείττων γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων).

The comparative "better" (kreditton, κρείττων) is a keyword in Hebrews, appearing 13 times to demonstrate Christ's and the new covenant's superiority. Angels held an exalted place in Jewish thought as God's messengers, executors of His will, and participants in giving the Law at Sinai (Acts 7:53, Galatians 3:19). Some first-century groups, including certain Jewish and early Gnostic movements, venerated angels excessively. The author counters any tendency to elevate angels to Christ's level.

Christ has "by inheritance obtained a more excellent name" (kekleronomēken onoma, κεκληρονόμηκεν ὄνομα). The perfect tense indicates a permanent acquisition. The "name" refers to Christ's title and status as "Son" (verse 5), which belongs to Him by eternal relationship with the Father and is publicly vindicated through His resurrection and exaltation (Philippians 2:9-11). Angels are servants;

Christ is the Son and heir. This fundamental distinction governs all subsequent comparisons in Hebrews.

Historical Context

Angels featured prominently in Second Temple Jewish theology and apocalyptic literature. Works like 1 Enoch, Jubilees, and the Dead Sea Scrolls elaborate extensively on angelic hierarchies, names, and functions. Angels were viewed as mediators between God and humanity, participants in cosmic worship, executors of divine judgment, and guardians of nations and individuals. The giving of the Law through angelic mediation (Galatians 3:19) heightened their significance in Jewish thought.

Some Jewish Christians may have struggled to understand how Jesus, who lived as a man, suffered, and died, could be superior to the glorious, immortal angels who had served God since creation. Cultural familiarity with angel veneration (see Colossians 2:18) and the impressive angelic role in Israel's history created potential for minimizing Christ's uniqueness. The author systematically dismantles this by showing Christ's superior nature, name, role, and accomplishment.

The emphasis on Christ's name connects to ancient Near Eastern and Jewish concepts of names representing essence and authority. To possess a more excellent name means to occupy a higher position in reality, not merely in title. The name "Son" signifies Christ's unique relationship to the Father, His participation in divine nature, and His authority over all creation—vastly surpassing any angelic designation.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. How does Christ's superiority to angels affect your understanding of spiritual warfare and how to resist temptation?
2. In what ways might modern believers be tempted to seek supplementary mediators or experiences beyond Christ?
3. What practical difference should Christ's "more excellent name" make in your prayer life and worship?

Interlinear Text

τοσούτῳ κρείττῳν γενόμενος τῶν ἀγγέλων ὅσῳ
so much better than Being made G3588 the angels as
G5118 G2909 G1096 G32 G3745

διαφορώτερον παρ' αὐτοὺς κεκληρονόμηκεν ὄνομα
a more excellent than they he hath by inheritance obtained name
G1313 G3844 G846 G2816 G3686

Additional Cross-References

Ephesians 1:21 (Parallel theme): Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:

1 Peter 3:22 (Creation): Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.

Hebrews 2:9 (Creation): But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

2 Thessalonians 1:7 (Parallel theme): And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

Colossians 1:18 (Parallel theme): And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

Colossians 2:10 (Parallel theme): And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:

Hebrews 1:9 (Parallel theme): Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

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