

Jesus is Greater Hebrews 1

1. He's some man (verses 1-3)

(The incomparable person of Jesus)

* Jesus is greater than the Old Testament heroes
- John 1:1-5

* Jesus is greater than creation and history
- Matthew 24; Luke 21; Mark 13; Ephesians 3:10-11;
John 8:58

* Jesus is God Himself

* Jesus redeems everything

2. He's no angel (verses 4-9)

(The incomparable position of Jesus)

- Revelation 19:10; Hebrews 1:6

3. He's the only One (verses 10-14)

(The incomparable purpose of Jesus)

- Hebrews 1:3

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West Valley Church
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Hebrews: Jesus is Greater

Chapter One¹

Today we are beginning a series that will take us all the way through this summer; we are going to take a chapter-by-chapter journey through the letter to the Hebrews, found in the New Testament. And this is a journey to be taken together, so we wanted to encourage you to read along with us over the summer, in preparation for each Sunday.

To encourage you to take this journey with us, we have made available a few copies of a Journal Bible of Hebrews. It is a little booklet that has a page of Scripture and a page that is blank for journal entries, so you can read and jot down your thoughts in it before the next Sunday. Or you can leave space to write down your own notes for each sermon. We have 18 copies of these that are available for \$5 apiece, or you can order them on Amazon.com. But we have three that we'd like to give away this morning, and here's how we are going to do it:

(Don't start yet – wait till I finish.) I will give this to the first person who will open our church app, and go to Summer Science Camps and give me what information is being asked for on the first fill-in of the volunteer page. Ready? Raise your hand when you get it. Go! (Now that you are there...maybe you'd like to sign up!)

Next, using the app, find the fifth of our six core values and tell me what it is. Ready? Raise your hand when you get it. Go!

Lastly, does someone have a verse from Hebrews that they can recite from memory? Raise your hand....

Great job! Now let's begin our journey through Hebrews.

Well, history records that he was great man. Yet he had humble beginnings. He grew up in a small village, an ordinary boy who did nothing to draw attention to himself.

Like most boys his age, he attended school. He also worked in the family business and did his best to grow up strong and healthy. Deep inside, however, he knew he had a special purpose, a destiny to fulfill.

As he grew older people began to notice that there was something special about this young man. He had talent and charisma. He was gifted like no other. It wasn't long before he started attracting crowds. Thousands came to see and listen to him.

¹ Sources: Kevin L. Anderson, *Hebrews: A Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition*, New Beacon Bible Commentary (Beacon Hill Press, Kansas City, 2013). Ray Stedman, *How to Live What You Believe: A Life Related Study in Hebrews* (Regal Books, Ventura, CA, 1974). John Peter Lange et al., *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Hebrews* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008). Gareth L. Cockerill, *Hebrews: A Bible Commentary in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Indianapolis, IN: Wesleyan Publishing House, 1998). Philip H Hacking, *Opening up Hebrews*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2006)

He chose a small band of loyal companions who traveled with him everywhere he went. Many of them had given up their jobs just to be with their idol and take care of his needs.

As his fame spread, some grew jealous of him. Others thought he was leading people astray, and they plotted against him. But his popularity only increased. He touched the lives of young and old alike and brought joy and laughter to the weak and downhearted. Many hailed him as king.

Toward the end of his short life, he suffered quite a bit. Some who had followed him fell away and turned to worshipping others.

He died alone. Those closest to him were left discouraged and confused. They never expected his life to end that way.

Soon after his death, there were rumors that he didn't really die. His followers spread the news all around. "He lives!" they said. "He is not dead!" Some claimed they actually saw him. Even today, many believe he is still alive. There are many people today who try to act like him and even try to look like him.

By now, you've probably figured out who this great man was.

His name was Elvis Presley.

Fooled you, didn't I? Elvis has been called "great," and he is among the many others that some people consider to be great for one reason or another. But no one compares to Jesus – Jesus *was* a human being, just like you. But He was also fully God, so their shared humanity is where the similarities end. Elvis came to sing and swing; Jesus came to seek and save.

There is only *one* Jesus Christ, Son of God, who was born of a virgin, died on a cross for the sins of the world, rose again on the third day, and today sits at the right hand of the Father, making intercession for everyone who calls on his name. There is no one and no thing greater than Jesus.

While others have been hailed as "king," there is only one "King of King and Lord of Lords." *That is the message of Hebrews.* Because of that King – Jesus – there is so much new and abundant life that is available to us, that can be gained in no other way but through a relationship with him. We can find abundant life, true peace and joy, and we can live a life that makes a profound and eternal difference in this world and in others' lives. Today we start our summer-long series in Hebrews called "Jesus is Greater."

I think you will be challenged by it, you'll gain profound insight into your spiritual life, you'll be smacked upside the head by it, and you'll be encouraged and know you are loved by it.

Let's begin by getting some background information on this book of the Bible. It's called Hebrews, because that is to whom it was written – Hebrew Christians, or another way to say it is Jewish Christians. We can tell that because of the content of the letter. We don't know where these Jewish were located or what city they were in. But we do know that it was probably written sometime before 70 AD – in fact,

most probably between 64-69. We know this because the author repeatedly refers to the Jewish Temple in the present tense, which means that when this letter was written, the Jewish Temple was still standing. But we know by history that the Temple was destroyed in 70 AD. So this book had to have been written before that. We also can tell from the writing in this letter that it's clear that the believers were being persecuted. Again, we know from history that the first great persecution of Christians began in 64 AD by the Emperor Nero. So by some simple sleuthing, we know that Hebrews must have been written between 64-69 AD.

We do not know who actually wrote the letter to the Hebrews. Original tradition assumed that Paul wrote it, but most scholars today don't agree with that. There are several reasons that Paul is dismissed as its author. One reason is that it doesn't fit Paul's style of writing, which includes the fact that in every other letter, Paul identifies himself, but the writer of Hebrews does not. By reading the letter, we realize that the writer *does* know Timothy because he writes about him. Timothy was Paul's disciple to whom Paul wrote two letters that are in the New Testament. So whoever the writer was, he had to be a contemporary of the Apostle Paul.

Also, whoever wrote the letter to the Hebrew Christians had to be extremely well educated in Greek ways of thinking, because many of the lines of reasoning were familiar to Greeks. But the writer also had to be very well trained in the Jewish faith – on the level of a priest – because the writer is an expert in Jewish theology and practice.

Different scholars have suggested various authors down through the ages: Paul himself, Clement of Rome, Luke (who was transcribing for Paul) or Luke (as the actual author), Timothy, Silas, Priscilla, Epaphras, Phillip, and even Mary, the mother of Jesus. But the best educated guess is that either Apollos or Barnabus wrote the letter. Apollos is mentioned in the Bible and history as a brilliant speaker. He worked with Paul at the Church in Corinth, and was from Alexandria so he was familiar with Greek reasoning, but was also extremely knowledgeable about Scripture. Martin Luther strongly believed it was Apollos that wrote it. The other suggestion was that Barnabus wrote it because he was Paul's partner in several great missionary adventures in Acts, and was also an Old Testament scholar. Barnabus was from the Priestly tribe or family of Levi. Many scholars lean toward Barnabus as the author, because Barnabus would have known Timothy, since he and Paul met and disciplined Timothy on their missionary journeys. But, as one scholar said, only God knows for sure who wrote this book of Scripture.

This book is kind of a mystery – it's the only New Testament book that we don't know who it was written by and whom it was written to. But it really doesn't matter, because we know God intended it to be written to *you* in His Word, in the New Testament. And it is jam-packed with incredible truths and practical teaching.

Since we are going to spend the summer going through this letter, it would be really good to know the purpose of it, or why the author wrote it. It's valuable for us to ask what was going on in the original readers' culture and what were they being warned about, so that we can understand how it is going to help us today.

Hebrews was written to deal directly with a situation that this particular group of Christians was facing, which was this: they were either being intensely persecuted or were about to be. The society around them was “branding them with dishonor and shame”² because they were Christians. Because of the way they were being treated by society, and because of the certainty of intense persecution, they felt vulnerable, insecure, isolated, and their confidence in their faith in Christ was being shaken. They were becoming very discouraged, and so they were not keeping the teachings of Christ and their relationship with him as primary in their lives. Some were turning away from Christ and turning back to their Jewish beliefs, because while Christians were being persecuted, Jews were a protected religion in the Roman Empire. All they had to do was renounce Christ and go back to being just Jews.

If you keep that in mind, then you can understand why there are five times in this letter that they are given frightening warnings about the danger of turning away from Christ (2:1-4; 3:7-4:13; 5:11-6:12; 10:19-39). You can understand why there is so much emphasis on Christ being greater than the old ways of the Jewish faith and traditions, about Christ being greater than other things that people put their faith in; about Christ being greater than their suffering and persecution, about faith in Christ being even greater than the faith of the prophets and Old Testament heroes, and about Christ being greater than anything this world has to offer, and that if we keep our faith in Christ, the peace and rest he will give us is greater than anything the world can give us. You get that idea when you see that the words “better” and “perfect” are used at least 24 times.

So does all that help set the context for this important letter? Good. Let’s start then by reading what Chapter One has to say to us. You can see the Scripture on the screen, but I’d encourage you to find it on your phone, or use your analog Bible. But would you show honor to God’s Word, inspired and preserved for us for our life in Christ, by standing as it is read?

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs. For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father”? Or again, “I will be his Father, and he will be my Son”? And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him.” In speaking of the angels he says, “He makes his angels spirits, and his servants flames of fire.”

² Anderson, 46

But about the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever; a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.” He also says, “In the beginning, Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.”

To which of the angels did God ever say, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”? Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?³ (Hebrews 1:1-13, niv)

May the sword of God’s Word enter deeply into our hearts and lives, as deep as the division of joint and marrow, that it may alter our very DNA into Christ likeness as we obey it. You may be seated.

Just to illustrate that the writer intends to prove that Christ is greater than the Old Testament ways, in those 13 verses the writer quotes eleven Old Testament passages, and I’ve printed them in this manuscript that you can download from our website if you want to do further exploration, or you can find them in your study Bibles.

I want you to understand that this is what you need to hear today about Jesus. Either you will hear what you did not know before, or you will be reminded of what you should have remembered. Either way, you will be required to decide what you will do about these truths.

The first is this...

1. He’s **some man** (verses 1-3)

In the first three short verses, right out of the gates, the writer forcefully establishes who Jesus Christ is, or in other words:

The Incomparable Person of Jesus

There are four amazing themes in just two sentences:

> **Jesus is greater than the Old Testament heroes.**

³ Hebrews 1:5 - Psalm 2:7; 2 Samuel 7:14; 1 Chronicles 17:13

Hebrews 1:6 - Deuteronomy 32:43

Hebrews 1:7 - Psalm 104:4

Hebrews 1:9 - Psalm 45:6,7

Hebrews 1:12 - Psalm 102:25-27

Hebrews 1:13 - Psalm 110:1

These verses tell us that Jesus is greater than the prophets. You have to understand that for the Jews, the prophets were the greatest men of the Old Testament era. They had visions of God and served him with great works of power, standing up against evil kings and spiritual authorities. They stopped the sun in its tracks and called down fire from heaven and destroyed cities. But not one of them could compare with Jesus Christ. God spoke to Job out of a whirlwind; He spoke to Joseph in dreams. He spoke to Moses out of a burning bush. He spoke to Joshua through an angel. He spoke to Samuel through a voice in the darkness. He spoke to Elijah through a whisper. He spoke to Daniel through a vision. But now, says the writer of Hebrews, God has spoken to us not in a dream or a vision, but *in person* — through his one and only Son. God spoke to our spiritual fathers through the prophets, but now God speaks to us directly through his Son, Jesus Christ. The prophets, great as they were, could not compare with Jesus. They may have spoken the word of God, but Jesus *is* the Word of God (John 1:1-5).

> Jesus is **greater** than **creation** and **history**.

This passage says that Jesus was appointed heir of all things and creator of the universe, and sustains all things by His powerful Word. We usually think of the word “heir” as describing someone who is given something by someone else in the past, right? For example, a person is the heir to an inheritance from a deceased parent. But here in Hebrews, that word “heir” is a word that is looking into the future as well – it encompasses all of time. What it’s saying is that Jesus is the culmination of all history. Jesus Himself, in Matthew 24, Luke 21, and Mark 13, told plainly what the end of time, as we know it, would be. Jesus is the terminating point of history. All things in this present world will end in Christ. In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (3:10-11), he said that all the events of the ages will find their fulfillment and meaning in Jesus. Jesus Christ stands at the end of the future and is at the beginning of the past, because He is the creator of worlds. Nothing began or exists but what began or exists *in Him*. Jesus made this amazing claim about Himself when he said:

“Before Abraham was born, I AM” (John 8:58, niv)

When Jesus made that statement, he was clearly telling the world that

> Jesus is **God Himself**.

There are two pictures used here to make this point. The first is that Jesus is the radiance of God’s glory. The word “radiance” in the original language can mean two things: it refers to either the light that *is reflected*, or it can refer to the light that *shines*, which is what this passage means. What it is saying is that Jesus is the very light – the very glory of God. He is not a *reflection* of light; he *is* the source of light.

The second picture says that Jesus is the exact representation of God. What this means is that Jesus is the exact image of God. Jesus is not a carbon copy; he’s not even a clone of God – Jesus is God Himself.

Then we see that:

> Jesus **redeems everything**.

If we really take a look at the way life is, all of us believe that the world was not intended to be this way. We think about Bill Haines getting Lou Gehrig's disease and dying, or Mary Clark succumbing to pneumonia because of her MD, or even men like Ken Meiers and Wally Benner who were good husbands and fathers and friends who lived a long life, but we still feel the grief of their deaths. Any of us who have lost loved ones or experienced tragedy or severe trials understand that the world should *not* be this way. And the Bible confirms this. The Scripture reveals that the world we live in is in desperate need of redemption. It needs to be brought back out of brokenness and uselessness and restored to its proper condition – like it was originally intended to be, full of life and purpose and joy. It was for this reason that Jesus Christ dealt a deathblow to sin and death – the one thing that is destroying human life and making this universe such an unpleasant place to live. Jesus provided purification for sins. And then *He sat down*. He sat down? You might think, "OK, he died on the cross, rose from the dead, put every person and the entire creation on a path to redemption, so he was probably pretty tired; no wonder he sat down." But that's not what the Bible means when it says Jesus "sat down." You see, for the Jewish Christians, that Jesus sat down means he completely finished the work. This term is used four times in this book, and it means a lot – you'll see it again when we get to chapter eight later this summer. But please understand that what Jesus has done for you is perfect – it is total and complete. You don't need anything else to deal with the sin and mess you've made of your life. You don't need anything else to be able to deal with the mess and brokenness and pain of this world. You don't need anything else to rely on when you are being put to death for your faith.

I told you this was packed – in the first three verses alone we get *all that!* And all that sets the stage for everything that follows. Now you know, Jesus is some man! But secondly...

2. He's **no angel** (verses 4-9)

Christ is superior to the prophets, but even more than that, this passage tells us that Jesus is also superior to the angels, or in other words...

The incomparable **position of Jesus.**

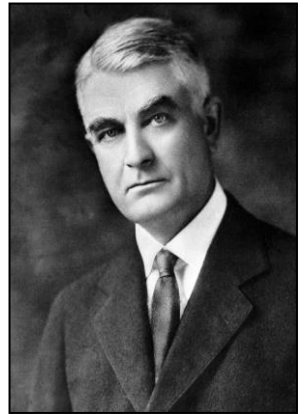
The prophets spoke the word of God, but Jesus Christ *is* the Word of God. The angels are *servants* of God, but Jesus Christ is the *Son* of God.



There's an old story is told of a famous actress back in the early 1900's all the way to the 1950's. Her name was Billie Burke. She was very famous in the 30's in a lot of different movies, but you might recognize her as Glinda, the good witch in *The Wizard of Oz*. Anyway, she was quite impressed with



herself at that time. Once, when she was on a transatlantic ocean trip, she noticed a man getting some sun on the deck who seemed to be suffering from a very bad head cold. "Are you uncomfortable?" she asked him. The man nodded his head. She said, "I'll tell you just what to do: go to your room and drink lots of orange juice. Take two aspirins. Cover yourself with all the blankets you can find. Sweat the cold out. I know what I'm talking about. I'm Billie Burke from Hollywood." "Thank you," the man said. "I'm glad to meet you. I'm Dr. Mayo from the Mayo Clinic." There was a huge difference between the two people. One had a home remedy, but the other was a physician. One thought her notoriety made her smart; the other in his anonymity was highly intelligent. Their positions in the medical world were vastly different. Here's the point: this verse is saying that angels may be able to *help* you, but Jesus alone *heals* and *saves* you. There is a *huge* difference.



In the last few decades there has been a growing interest in angels and angelology. People go to workshops to be taught how to discover their guardian angel, how to pray to angels, and people can read books and buy trinkets that will remind them of their ever-present guardian angel. Well, the Jews at the time this was written did that and even more so – they had *extensive* teaching about angels. They knew all the jobs and tasks that angels had, all their ranks and positions, and they thought everyone had a guardian angel. Let me just say to you what the writer to the Hebrews said, but let me put it in my own words: that is all a bunch of *hooey*! I can tell you that there are even some Christians who actually worship and pray to angels – I worked with one lady who used to go to our church who was caught up in all that junk, and junk is what it is. Now, I'll tell you that our family has had our own experiences with angels – God sent them to attend to our son Brenden when he was two years old and almost died twice. As a two and three year old, he described the angels to us. But let me just agree with this passage (hear me!): *why focus on the servants when you can have the Son? Why worship and pray to an angel when the angels worship Jesus Christ?* Angels are majestic and powerful servants of God who overwhelm people with their glory. In the book of Revelation John tells us what it was like when he had an encounter with an angel:

"I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, 'Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God!'" (Revelation 19:10)

But Jesus is greater than any and every angel. Remember that the writer of Hebrews quotes the Scripture when he teaches us:

"And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, 'Let all God's angels worship him'" (Hebrews 1:6)

The angels are *not* to be worshiped, but God's Son Jesus Christ is to be worshiped — even by angels. Yes – angels are far more powerful than us, and far higher up the food chain than we are. But it's not the angels who someday get to rule and reign

with Christ – it’s you and me! Let God decide what to do with angels in your life. *You* decide what to do with Jesus Christ.

Jesus is some man, He’s no angel, that’s for sure, and third...

3. He’s the **only One** (*verses 10-14*)

The work of Jesus Christ is totally different from other religious leaders, and even other great people of the Jewish and Christian faiths. His work comes as a result of his position. His position as the Son makes him the Savior of the world — that was his purpose. He alone could do that work. In other words, the author writes about...

The incomparable purpose of Jesus.

The writer of Hebrews says:

“After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven” (Hebrews 1:3).

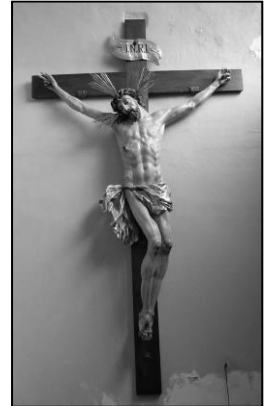
No one else was qualified to do that. And that’s what verses 10-14 point out – the whole chapter really. The prophets were not qualified to save the world, as great as they were and as close to God as they were. The angels are not qualified to save the world, as beautiful and powerful as they are. Only the perfect Son of God has the qualifications to save the world. Only His death was good enough to give life to you and me. He alone could take away our sins through his sacrifice on the cross. Jesus Christ alone is qualified for his position. He is uniquely and fully qualified for the work he was given to do. In fact, there is no one else who is in any way able to do what Jesus Christ has done. Only the greatest of all could do the perfect work we need.

You must decide what to do with Jesus Christ, because he is greater than anything or anyone that you are currently trusting in. You must either accept him, or, if you already have, you must put him in the place of supreme importance in your entire life.

Let me close with this story: near the city of San Jose dos Campos, in Brazil, there is a remarkable facility.⁴ It is a prison that at one time was known for being notoriously evil and violent. It was so bad, the guards wouldn’t even go in. So, in desperation, over thirty-five years ago, the Brazilian government turned the prison over to two Christians. The government didn’t know what else to do, so they gave up and gave it to these two Christian men. The institution was renamed Humaita (oomy-ta), and their plan was to run the prison on Christian principles. Today, with the exception of the two full time staff, the inmates do all the work in the prison. Families outside the prison adopt an inmate to work with during and after his term. Chuck Colson, founder of Prison Fellowship, visited the prison and made this report: "When I visited (that prison), I found the inmates smiling – particularly the murderer who held the keys, opened the gates and let me in. Wherever I walked I

⁴ http://restorative-justice.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/ECOR_Final%20Version%20EN.pdf

saw men at peace. I saw clean living areas, people working industriously. The walls were decorated with biblical sayings from Psalms and Proverbs.... (Later) my guide escorted me to the notorious prison area once used for torture. Today, he told me, that entire block houses only a *single* inmate. (He took me to that cell to see that prisoner) As we reached the end of the long concrete corridor and he put the key in the lock, he paused and asked, 'Are you sure you want to go in?' Chuck Colson says he answered impatiently, 'Of course. I've been in isolation cells all over the world. I've seen the worst.' Slowly, the man swung open the massive door, and I saw the prisoner in that punishment cell: a crucifix, beautifully carved by the inmates – the lone prisoner – Jesus, hanging on a cross. My guide said softly, 'He's doing time for the rest of us'."



Listen my friends, great Old Testament prophets can not do that for you. Angels cannot do that for you. Your friends cannot do that for you. Donald Trump or Barack Obama or politicians or government or the military or veterans cannot do that for you. People with prestige and wealth cannot do that for you. *No one* can do that for you. The only One that can serve your time, who can take your punishment for you, is Jesus Christ. And He did it perfectly because he has risen from the dead. He's some man. He's no angel. He's the Only One. What will you do with Him? If you find that you have not taken Him seriously enough in your life, maybe you'd like to pray.

Let's do it.