

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS

Lesson 3, Chapters 1:5—2:4, The Exordium continued: The Son is Greater Than the Angels

In the first sentence of the inspired writer's address [the first 4 verses in the English translation] the writer of the Letter to the Hebrews has established the superiority of God the Son:

1. The superiority of the Son as the climax of the revelation of God the Father to mankind
2. The superiority of the Son as God's heir and the force behind creation
3. The superiority of the Son over God's heavenly messengers, the angels

It is because of His superiority that the Son has been exalted by God the Father and conquering sin and death has taken His place at the right hand of God—the right hand being the place of power and authority and from where the Son rules as King of all the nations of the earth.

Having announced the Son's superiority over the angels, the inspired writer continues by offering proof from passages of Old Testament Sacred Scripture—illustrating the continuity between God's revelation in the past and the climax of God's revelation to man in the Son. St. Thomas Aquinas taught in verses 5-14 St. Paul showed how the Son exceeds the angels by listing four aspects of the Son's superiority:

1. By His divine sonship
2. By His dominion
3. By His origin
4. By God's declaration

<p>Old Testament Passages quoted in Hebrews 1:5-13 Offered as Proof of the Son's Superiority over the Angels</p>

<p>Bold type = portion of passage quoted in Hebrews</p>

<p>1. Psalm 2:7-8, <i>I will proclaim the decree of Yahweh: He said to me, 'You are my son, today have I fathered (begotten) you. Ask of me, and I shall give you the nations as your birthright, the whole wide world as your possession.</i></p>

<p>2. 2 Samuel 7:14-16a, <i>I shall be a father to him and he a son to me; if he does wrong I shall punish him with a rod such as men use, with blows such as mankind gives. But my faithful love will never be withdrawn from him as I withdrew it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your throne and your sovereignty will ever stand firm before me and your throne be for ever secure.</i></p>

<p>3. Deuteronomy 32:43, <i>Heavens, rejoice with him, let all the children (literal O.T = sons; Hebrews has "angels") of God pay him homage! Nations, rejoice with his people, let God's envoys tell of his power! For he will avenge the blood of his servants, he will return vengeance to my foes, he will repay those who hate him and purify his people's country.</i></p>

<p>4. Psalm 104:3-4, <i>You stretch out the heavens like a tent, build your palace in the waters above, making the clouds your chariot, gliding on the wings of the wind, appointing the</i></p>

<i>winds your messengers, flames of fire your servants.</i>
5. Psalm 45:6-7a, <i>Your throne is from God</i> (literal = O God is) <i>for ever and ever, the scepter of your kingship a scepter of justice, you love uprightness and detest evil.</i>
6. Psalm 45:7b-9, <i>This is why God, your God, has anointed you with oil of gladness, as none of your rivals, your robes all myrrh and aloes.</i>
7. Psalm 102:25-27, <i>Long ago you laid earth's foundations, the heavens are the work of your hands. They pass away but you remain; they all wear out like a garment, like outworn clothes you change them; but you never alter, and your years never end.</i>
8. Psalm 110:1, <i>Yahweh declared to my Lord (Adonai), "Take your seat at my right hand, till I have made your enemies your footstool."</i>

All these Scripture passages quoted in the Letter to the Hebrews are from the Greek translation of Hebrew God inspired Sacred Scripture known as the Septuagint. In the lesson these quotations from the Greek translation of the Old Testament will be designated by the symbol LXX. All eight quotes in Hebrews 1:5-13 are from the LXX.

It is interesting that the inspired writer uses 8 quotes from 7 different passages. In the significance of number for the Jews the number 8 represented rebirth (as in the 8 people saved in the Great Flood), regeneration (on the 8th day a boy baby was circumcised and became an official member of the Covenant family of God) and for Christians symbolized resurrection (Jesus was resurrected on Sunday the 1st day of the week (the first day of the old Creation) which was also the 8th day—the day after the 7th day which was the Jewish Sabbath. For the Jews the number 7 was one of the 4 “perfect” numbers, representing fullness and completeness; it was also the number of covenant (the first covenant formed with Adam was on the 7th day of creation). For Christians it was also the number of God the Holy Spirit. St. John does something similar with numbers in the last 7 visions in the Book of Revelation. St. John has 7 last visions [Revelation 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11; 21:1] but the Greek phrase which introduces each vision *kai eidon*, “And I saw” is repeated 8 times in the literal Greek translation [Revelation 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11; 12 (additional phrase); 21:1]. See CCC # 349 for the significance of the number 8 as the number of the Resurrection.