



Angelic Introductions: The Utilization of Angels in the Epistle to the Hebrews

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Angelic Introductions: The Utilization of Angels in the Epistle to the Hebrews

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Abstract

A primary objective for the epistle to the Hebrews is to encourage the persecuted audience to persevere. The message of perseverance begins with a comparison between Jesus and the angels; and throughout the first two chapters of Hebrews angels are mentioned multiple times. This thesis suggests the frequency of angelic mentions in the introductory chapters of Hebrews utilizes the angels to introduce foundational themes discussed throughout the remainder of Hebrews. This claim is supported by first analyzing the utilization of angels in other New Testament epistles by separating the verses that mention angels into the following four categories: angels utilized to describe humanity's relationship with God; angels utilized to elevate Christ and his message; angels utilized to promote peaceful human relations; and angels utilized to provide messages of warning. This categorical examination demonstrates there are similarities between the New Testament epistles and Hebrews based on genre, but ultimately notes the differences in the utilization of angels between the epistles and Hebrews. Secondly, a description on the occasion, literary structure, and rhetorical nature of Hebrews is provided in order to discuss the introductory nature of angels in regard to major themes in Hebrews. Thirdly, the verses that mention angels in Hebrews are analyzed to demonstrate the connection of angels to introducing major themes in Hebrews. This examination separates the verses that mention angels into three categories: angels utilized to introduce Christ; angels utilized to encourage humanity; and angels utilized to point towards the future. The analyzation of angels within these categories demonstrate angels are utilized

in Hebrews to introduce major theological topics that are discussed throughout the epistle.

Dedication

To my parents, Victor and Leticia; siblings, Maria and Miguel; and late grandmother, Rebecca de Jesus Martinez, for their unwavering support, prayers, and love.

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Chapter I.

Introduction

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering.

—Hebrews 12:22¹

A primary objective for the epistle to the Hebrews is to encourage the persecuted audience to persevere.² Throughout the epistle this argument is upheld through comparisons between Jesus and biblical figures such as Moses, Aaron, the Levitical priesthood, and angels. In the introduction to Hebrews, it is the comparison between Jesus and the angels that heralds the message of endurance to the persecuted audience. In its structure, rhetoric, and overall theology, Hebrews has been regarded as a text shrouded in mystery.³ Among the mysteries that accompanies this fascinating text is its angelic introduction. The first two chapters mention angels in earnest while laying the foundation for the argument of Hebrews. However, after the introduction, angels are mentioned only two more times within the text of Hebrews. The lack of angelic mentions within the remainder of the epistle furthers the curiosity surrounding the frequency of angels in the introduction. This thesis aims to explore the function of angels in the epistle to the

¹ The New Oxford Annotated Bible with Apocrypha: New Revised Standard Version; all subsequent biblical citations are from this version unless otherwise noted.

² Verses which encourage faithfulness, endurance, perseverance, and to hold fast include Hebrews 2:1, 3:6, 3:12, 3:14, 4:14, 6:1, 10:23, 10:35, 12:1, 12:7, and 13:1.

³ James W. Thompson, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 20.

Hebrews and proposes that Hebrews utilizes angels as a means to introduce major topics which sustain the overall argument of Hebrews.

The unique introduction to the epistle to the Hebrews mentions angels several times which first led me to an interest in the role of angels in the new covenant presented in Hebrews. I began this research project by first exploring the roles Hebrews appeared to assign to angels in its new covenant theology, in contrast to roles previously mentioned in what Hebrews presents as the old covenant. The intent was to note the similarities and differences between the roles of angels in Hebrews and other Jewish literature from the same time-period. However, as the project evolved the question of “what is the function of angels in the epistle to the Hebrews” proved of greater interest due to my curiosity regarding the frequent use of angels in the first two chapters of Hebrews in contrast to the remainder of the epistle.

What did the angels accomplish for the text of Hebrews? How did angels serve the introduction to Hebrews? How does their presence in the introduction to Hebrews define Christ or humanity? Does the mention of angels offer insight between the relationship of Christ and humanity? Ultimately, what is the function of angels for the overall text of Hebrews? The focus on how the angels functioned in Hebrews led me to shift my research from exploring angels in Jewish literature to analyzing the use of angels in other New Testament epistles, a topic that to my knowledge, has yet to be addressed in scholarship. To fully discuss the function of angels in Hebrews, I suggest that it is important to analyze how angels function and affect the other New Testament epistles that mention angels. Thus, the following will discuss the angels in the New Testament epistles in comparison with the epistle to the Hebrews. This comparative study aims to

recognize the unique utilization of angels for the theology of Hebrews, while also noting similarities.

The discussion on the utilization of angels in Hebrews focuses primarily on the rhetorical and literary nature of Hebrews. In regard to the rhetorical aspects and literary structure of Hebrews there has been a plethora of scholarship which encompasses a variation of methods. Some examples include Harold W. Attridge's *Hermeneia* commentary on Hebrews which analyzed the epistle through the methods of historical, textual, and genre criticism.⁴ Another rhetorical perspective was David A. deSilva's *Perseverance in Gratitude* which explores Hebrews through the lens of social-scientific criticism.⁵ The literary structure of Hebrews has been explored in Michael W. Martin and Jason A. Whitlark's *Inventing Hebrews* which notes the epideictic and deliberative rhetoric in Hebrews.⁶ Finally, the rhetorical use of empathic statements within the epistle has been explored by Chee-Chiew Lee.⁷ These examples of the scholarship on the rhetoric of Hebrews demonstrates this area has been approached from a variety of avenues throughout the years. However, scholarship on the rhetoric of Hebrews often encompasses the whole epistle; this may help to explain why there is no primary focus on the utilization of angels.

Furthermore, there has been research regarding the angels in the epistle to the Hebrews. The angelic mentions in Hebrews have been analyzed in comparison with

⁴ Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989).

⁵ David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).

⁶ Michael W. Martin and Jason A. Whitlark, *Inventing Hebrews: Design and Purpose in Ancient Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

⁷ Chee-Chiew Lee, "The Rhetoric of Empathy in Hebrews," *Novum Testamentum* 62, no. 2 (2020): 201–218, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685365-12341659>.

angelic figures in Second Temple Judaism.⁸ This has included comparisons with Jewish apocalyptic literature which involved the figures of Moses and Melchizedek.⁹ Other research has examined Hebrews' angelic mentions through the motif of rivalry with humanity,¹⁰ and angelomorphic Christology.¹¹ These resources offer insight into the nature of angels in Hebrews and are beneficial to this project.

This thesis will analyze the function of angels in the epistle to the Hebrews, while arguing their utilization in Hebrews sets the foundation for claims made throughout the epistle. First, the occurrences of angels in New Testament epistles will be analyzed in order to contrast them to the mentions in Hebrews. This examination into the other epistles aims to demonstrate there are similarities between the epistles based on genre, but ultimately the angel's function in a more primary aspect in Hebrews. Secondly, a brief description on the occasion, literary structure, and rhetorical nature of Hebrews will

⁸ For studies on angels in Second Temple Judaism, see Maxwell J. Davidson, *Angels at Qumran: A Comparative Study of 1 Enoch 1-36; 72-108 and Sectarian Writings from Qumran* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); Randall C. Gleason, "Angels and the Eschatology of Hebrews 1-2," *New Testament Studies* 49, no. 1 (2003): 90-107, doi:10.1017/S0028688503000067; Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *The Myth of Rebellious Angels: Studies in Second Temple Judaism and New Testament Texts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014); and Cecilia Wassen, "Angels in the Dead Sea Scrolls," *Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook* 2007, no. 2007 (2007): 499-524, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110192957.6.499>.

⁹ Studies focused on angels in Apocalyptic Literature, include Stefan Beyerle, "Angelic Revelation in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," *Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook* 2007, no. 2007 (2007): 205-226, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110192957.2.205>; Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Gert J. Steyn, "Hebrews' Angelology in the Light of Early Jewish Apocalyptic Imagery," *Journal of Early Christian History* 1, no. 1 (2011): 143-164, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2222582x.2011.11877235>; and Loren T. Stuckenbruck, "Melchizedek in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 41, no. 1 (2018): 124-138, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X18788983>.

¹⁰ For studies focused on angelic rivalry with humanity, see Georg Gäbel, "Rivals in Heaven: Angels in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook* 2007, no. 2007 (2007): 357-376, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110192957.4.357>; and Joseph P. Schultz, "Angelic Opposition to the Ascension of Moses and the Revelation of the Law," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 61, no. 4 (1971): 282-307, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1453673>.

¹¹ For studies on Angelomorphic Christology, see Gabriele Boccaccini, "Jesus the Messiah: Man, Angel or God? The Jewish Roots of Early Christology," *Annali Di Scienze Religiose* 4 (2011): 193-220, <https://doi.org/10.1484/j.asr.1.102573>; Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017); and Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Tübingen: WUNT 70, 1995).

be presented. This section is beneficial in order to discuss the overall function of angels in Hebrews. Third, the verses that mention angels in Hebrews will be analyzed to demonstrate their function and importance to the overall theology of the epistle to the Hebrews. The occurrence of angels will be separated into three categories to better facilitate a discussion surrounding them. Finally, a conclusion will summarize the findings of this project.

Chapter II.

Angelic Mentions in New Testament Epistles

Introduction

Angels are featured throughout the New Testament, in the Gospels, Acts, the epistles, and Revelation. Within a number of the non-epistolary writings the occurrence of the word angel or angels is more than the epistle to the Hebrews;¹² however, the mention of angels in these texts tend to be interactive with the narrative. Within these writings angels reveal themselves in dreams, appear in apocalyptic visions, deliver divine messages, and offer assistance or information to certain people. The angels may appear with greater frequency within these books, but in a different style from the epistle to the Hebrews.

Since Hebrews is an epistle, it would be appropriate to compare the number of occurrences of angels to other epistles in the New Testament. The ten New Testament epistles besides Hebrews that mention angels are: Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Jude.¹³ Among these ten epistles the word angel or angels is mentioned a combined total of eighteen times.¹⁴ In contrast the word angel or angels is mentioned thirteen times in the epistle to

¹² Scott D. Mackie, "Ancient Jewish Mystical Motifs in Hebrews' Theology of Access and Entry Exhortations," *New Testament Studies* 58, no. 1 (2021): 88–104, doi:10.1017/S0028688511000269.

¹³ Romans 8:38, 1 Corinthians 4:9, 1 Corinthians 6:3, 1 Corinthians 11:10, 1 Corinthians 13:1, 2 Corinthians 11:14, Galatians 1:8, Galatians 3:19, Galatians 4:14, Colossians 2:18, 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 1 Timothy 3:16, 1 Timothy 5:21, 1 Peter 1:12, 1 Peter 3:22, 2 Peter 2:4, 2 Peter 2:11, and Jude 1:6.

¹⁴ The occurrence of the word angel(s) has been determined through the use of the NRSV translation of the Bible, in particular The New Oxford Annotated Bible.

the Hebrews. The second highest occurrence of angels in a single epistle is 1 Corinthians with four occurrences of the word angels. This brief numerical observation appears to facilitate the idea that angels are of importance to the theology, structure, or argument of Hebrews, since they are mentioned with greater frequency in comparison to the other New Testament epistles.

The feature of angels in these epistles differ from Hebrews for they are not utilized to introduce major points of the epistle. Rather angels are included in these epistles to uphold a certain point that might be central or secondary to the epistle. The angelic mentions of angels in the epistles will be analyzed in four categories. Separating the occurrences of the word angel into categories will demonstrate how angels are utilized within the epistles. First, angels are utilized to describe humanity's relationship with God; second, angels are utilized to elevate Christ and his message; third, angels are utilized to promote peaceful human relations; finally, angels are utilized to provide messages of warning. There are areas of overlap within these four categories; but overall, the angels in the New Testament epistles are used to uphold an argument in relation to one of these areas.

Angels Utilized to Describe Humanity's Relationship with God

The epistles which utilize the angels to discuss God's relationship with humanity are Romans and 1 Peter. In both of these epistles when the angels are mentioned it is simply as another example or factor that aids in describing God's temperament towards humanity. Although the situations may be different for both epistles, the angels are utilized in a similar manner to describe the scope or uniqueness of the relationship between God and humanity.

In Romans 8, the angels are mentioned when discussing the relationship between God and humanity. The text informs the audience of Romans that they are children of God through the spirit of God. Furthermore, this relationship between God and God's children was anticipated by all of creation. This discussion on being children of God leads to verse 38 which states,

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The inclusion of angels in a rhetorical list of ten amplifies the love God has for humanity.¹⁵ Furthermore, it demonstrates the incredible bounds of the relationship. The previous mention of creation provides a time frame for the longevity of this relationship, which implies from the beginning of time this relationship was to exist. In contrast, angels among the other parameters in the list provide a reference to the scope of this relationship. If this relationship is meant to exist since creation, then not even a supernatural power like the angels could interfere. If heavenly beings cannot interfere, this implies other forces mortal or immortal are unable to interfere as well. Thus, the mention of angels in Romans serves to demonstrate the scope of God's relationship with humanity.

Similarly, 1 Peter 1:12 demonstrates the uniqueness of God's relationship with humanity. 1 Peter situates the angels in the cosmic history of Christ's salvation. The implication is that salvation is for humanity; however, the angels long to hear this message. The text presents the gospel as a grand revelation to the audience of 1 Peter, and this good news is amplified through the use of the angels. If these heavenly beings long

¹⁵ Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 33.

to have the mysteries of the gospel revealed to them, then the message must be extraordinary for the audience.¹⁶ It is important to note the text does not state the angels receive salvation, simply that the concept of salvation is “things in which the angels longed to look.” Thus, the angels are used to demonstrate the cosmic scope of the salvation message, not only is it a message communicated to humanity, but a message valued by heavenly beings.

This mention of angels overlaps with the category of angels utilized to elevate the message of Christ; however, it mainly serves as a demonstration to the uniqueness of God’s relationship with humanity. For it establishes the value of the gospel message of Christ through discussing the relationship between God and humanity. These mysteries of the gospel message which the angels long to look towards is designated for people. It appears humanity is privileged to accept this gospel message. Thus, humanity’s relationship with God is unique in contrast to the angels.

The epistles of Romans and 1 Peter utilize the angels to discuss God’s relationship with humanity. Romans utilizes the angels to discuss the magnitude of God’s relationship with humanity, while 1 Peter employs the angels to demonstrate God’s relationship with humanity is unique.

Angels Utilized to Elevate Christ and His Message

Angels are often referred to in the epistles to elevate the nature of Christ. Galatians 3:19, 1 Timothy 3:16, and 1 Peter 3:22 utilize the angels to speak on the nature

¹⁶ Donald P. Senior and Daniel J. Harrington, *1 Peter, Jude and 2 Peter* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 34.

of Christ, ultimately elevating Jesus and the gospel message associated with him to a status of importance.

Chapter 3 in Galatians connects the gospel message the Galatians had received with the promises of Abraham. The text insinuates the promises of Abraham can extend to gentile believers. This claim asserts the covenant with Moses does not annul the promises to Abraham's descendants.¹⁷ The angels become relevant in this conversation when the text states the covenant with Moses was "ordained through angels by a mediator."¹⁸ The angels are given a prominent role as messengers of a covenant. Thus, in the epistle to the Galatians, the angels are given a significant role in the history of promises and covenants. The angels served in God's redemptive work by being mediators of the law and delivering commandments that were meant to be observed.¹⁹ This designation as messengers of a covenant serves to elevate the gospel message that Galatians is defending. The promises to Abraham, the covenant through the angels, and now the message of Christ appears to be a covenant history that the epistle to the Galatians is advocating to its audience. The previous promises and covenant are valued, in turn it validates the current message of Christ, since it is presented as a continuation. Thus, the mentions of angels as previous covenant messengers serve to validate the connected history of the Galatians' gospel. The angels serve to elevate the message of Christ to a level of importance, such as the previous covenant which was associated with angels.

¹⁷ Debbie Hunn, "'Why Therefore the Law?' The Role of the Law in Galatians 3:19-20," *Neotestamentica* 47, no. 2 (2013): 355-72, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43048922>.

¹⁸ Galatians 3:19.

¹⁹ Hunn, "'Why Therefore the Law?' The Role of the Law in Galatians 3:19-20," 368.

1 Peter 3:22 details the glorious triumph of Christ over death that is manifested in the act of his resurrection. The culmination of Christ's victory is his new placement at the right hand of God. The resurrected Christ resides in heaven in a victorious royal position and the text states, "angels, authorities, and powers"²⁰ are made subject to him. This verse presents Jesus' authority over the heavenly angels. The angels in 1 Peter 3 serve to display the all-encompassing triumph of the resurrected Christ over all spirits. Thus, the angels function in this particular verse to elevate Christ and his message to a place of royalty and authority.

1 Timothy 3:16 utilizes the angels to elevate the gospel message of Christ. This chapter focuses on the organization of the church and congregation. The verse mentioning the angels is towards the end of a list containing regulations to sustain order. It is at the conclusion of this list that angels are mentioned when speaking about Christ. 1 Timothy 3:16 states, "Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great: He was revealed in flesh, vindicated in spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among Gentiles, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory." The regulations for the congregation are connected to the message of Christ. In turn the message of Christ is validated through a list of proofs. Among the evidence for the message of Christ is the angels as witnesses. It is possible this is a reference to the angels who announced Jesus' resurrection in the gospels.²¹ However, this could be the angels in a cosmic event being made aware of the message of Christ. In either instance the angels are divine witnesses to the gospel of Jesus. The angels are utilized as observers of Christ and his message, as if their

²⁰ 1 Peter 3:22.

²¹ Benjamin Fiore and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Pastoral Epistles: First Timothy, Second Timothy, Titus* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 85.

association lends legitimacy to the message. Thus, the angels in these verses serve to elevate the message of Christ to a level of importance that encourages the audience to believe and obey.

Angels Utilized to Promote Peaceful Human Relations

The epistles of 1 Corinthians and Galatians utilize the mention of angels to promote unity among the congregations. The mentions of angels in 1 Corinthians encourage harmony within the Corinth congregation. In contrast, the angelic mention in Galatians praises kind treatment and appears to be an example to follow. In both cases, the angels aid in utilizing the concept of unity among Jesus followers.

The epistle of 1 Corinthians mentions angels four times; these occurrences are found in 1 Corinthians 4:9, 6:3, 11:10, and 13:1. Each of these instances can be related to relationships within the Corinth community. Thus, the mention of angels serves to point towards unity, conduct, and love.

In 1 Corinthians 4:9 Paul's trials as an apostle are defined as a spectacle to all, human and heavenly; the verse states, "For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals." The mention of both angels and humanity together creates a cosmic dimension for those witnessing this spectacle;²² the observers range from the mortal to immortal. The angels are utilized to demonstrate the scope of the example used in the text. Furthermore, since most of 1 Corinthians is concerned with restoring unity between the congregation, it appears the angels being witnesses to Paul's

²² Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 219.

trials could have divine implications for the Corinth community. To include the angels in the viewership of this proposed spectacle; perhaps, demonstrates the importance Paul put on his mission to reunite the Corinth community. It is not just a mortal matter, but their unity has divine implications. For if even the angels are spectators to Paul's hardships, possibly they are viewing the quarrels of the Corinth community. Thus, in 1 Corinthians 4, the angels are utilized to create divine implications for mortal actions in an attempt to reconcile the Corinthians.

The theme of unity is continued in chapter 6 in which the Corinth community is encouraged to abstain from taking one another to court. The text provides a list of reasons to abstain from this practice; one of the motives is a reference to a future event in which the members of the community will judge the angels. 1 Corinthians 6:3 states, "Do you not know that we are to judge angels—to say nothing of ordinary matters?" The future event of humans judging angels is an interesting eschatological concept; however, it is not the focal point of this statement. The implication is that if the Corinth congregation will one day bring judgement upon angelic beings, then they are capable of resolving matters among themselves.²³ The angels are used as an example of future events amongst Jesus followers as a reminder to how one should conduct themselves in the present. Judging angels is a future event that is mentioned in an attempt to create peace in the present moment for the Corinthians.

This verse provides an idea of future events; however, the main implication is the present relationship of the assembly. The action of judging angels in the future is beneficial for the present in this passage, for it encourages the congregation to resolve

²³ Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 248.

issues among themselves. The angels are mentioned as a device to encourage harmony among the congregation. Thus, this angelic mention appears to foster unity with a glimpse towards the future.

1 Corinthians 11 continues to address human relationships by discussing conduct during congregational worship. Among the practices that are encouraged is a statement for women to cover their head during worship “because of the angels.” The text provides the argument that men are created in the image of God and women are created in the image of men; thus, women should have a symbol of authority on their head “because of the angels.” The phrase, “because of the angels” in relation to this practice is not fully explained and has been interpreted in various ways.

First, this could be implications of a hierarchy structure according to creation order during worship, such as God, men, then women.²⁴ However, the phrase “because of the angels” in connection with women appears to include angels in the hierarchy, yet their position of succession is unclear. This could indicate they are equal with women; however, it could suggest angels as higher or lower in the line of succession. There are hierarchal implications in this verse; nevertheless, the placement of angels and women is debatable.²⁵ It appears the mention of angels in this hierarchical structure is meant to encourage head coverings, but the reasoning is not fully articulated.

Secondly, “because of the angels” could imply women should cover their heads because angels are present in worship with the congregation. This is a possible

²⁴ Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 235-236.

²⁵ For more on gender, angels, and hierarchy in 1 Corinthians 11, see Jason David BeDuhn, “‘Because of the Angels’: Unveiling Paul’s Anthropology in 1 Corinthians 11,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 118, no. 2 (1999): 295–320, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3268008>; and Cecilia Wassen, “‘Because of the Angels’: Reading 1 Cor 11:2–16 in Light of Angelology in the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls in Context*, ed. Armin Lange, Emanuel Tov, and Matthias Weigold (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 735-754.

interpretation based on texts from the Qumran community, such as Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice,²⁶ and The Rule of the Congregation²⁷ which mention angels worshiped amongst the congregation. Perhaps the early Jesus followers ascribed to the same view and believed the angels worshiped among them. The angels worshiping amongst humanity is a concept mentioned in Hebrews which depicts angels worshiping among the people; however, it is presented as a future event. Thus, the idea of angels worshiping amongst the congregation may have been an accepted viewpoint.²⁸

Thirdly, building on the idea that angels are worshiping among the congregation, if the community believed angels were among them, perhaps there was a belief it could lead to temptation. In this interpretation, the implication is that women are told to cover their heads “because of the angels” in relation to concerns surrounding angels desiring women.²⁹ Genesis 6 notes the sons of God desired human women.³⁰ If angels once desired women, perhaps the early Christians were concerned with this matter. Thus, they

²⁶ “how shall we be considered [among] them? And how shall our priesthood (be considered) in their habitations? And our holiness--how can it compare with] their [surpassing] holiness? [What] is the offering of our mortal tongue (compared) with the knowledge of the el[im?...] [...] our [s]ong, let us exalt the God of knowledge;” Songs of Sabbath Sacrifice 4q400 2:6-8. Translation from Carol Newsom, *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice: A Critical Edition* (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 111-112.

²⁷ “No man, defiled by any of the impurities of a man, shall enter the assembly ... these shall not enter to take their place among the congregation of famous men, for the angels of holiness are among their congreg[ation.]” The Rule of the Congregation 1QSa 2:3-4,8-9. Translation from, and Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: the Qumran Texts in English* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 127.

²⁸ Studies focused on angelic worship, include Peter Schäfer, “Communion with the Angels: Qumran and the Origins of Jewish Mysticism,” in *Wege Mystischer Gotteserfahrung. Mystical Approaches to God*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Elisabeth Müller-Luckner (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), 37-66; and Paulo Augusto de Souza Nogueira, “Celestial Worship and Ecstatic-Visionary Experience,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 25, no. 2 (2002): 165–184, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X0202500204>.

²⁹ Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 418.

³⁰ For more on Genesis 6:1-4 and ancient Jewish traditions about fallen angels, see Jan Doehorn, “The Motif of the Angels’ Fall in Early Judaism,” *Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook* 2007, no. 2007 (2007): 477-498, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110192957.5.477>; Macarena E. Garcia, “Who Tempted the Woman? Variations of the Edenic Episode in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature,” *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia* 18 (2021): 75–94, <https://doi.org/10.21071/cco.v18i0.1197>; Annette Yoshiko Reed, *Fallen Angels and the History of Judaism and Christianity: The Reception of Enochic Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Archie T. Wright, *The Origin of Evil Spirits: The Reception of Genesis 6:1-4 in Early Jewish Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015.).

encouraged women to cover their heads during worship in the event that angels were worshipping among them.

Fourth, it is possible that women covering their heads as a symbol of authority “because of the angels” is not related to fallen angels desiring women. Instead, it could be a reference to the Corinthians judging angels.³¹ An earlier mention of angels in 1 Corinthians 6:3 states, the Corinth community will judge the angels in what appears to be a future event. If the head covering is a reference to the future judgment of angels, then “because of the angels” is a reminder that when the Corinth community judges the angels women will share in that authority.

Regardless of the possible interpretation these ideas all point towards the angels being used to encourage what the text viewed as proper worship conduct. The exact reason and interpretation are debatable; nevertheless, the motive is head coverings for women. The mention of angels in this passage is used to reinforce conduct in worship. It appears this list of worship conduct is meant to bring order to the congregation of Corinth; thus, like prior mentions of angels in Corinth, the angels are being utilized to foster harmony and order amongst the Corinthians.

In 1 Corinthians 13, the text emphasizes the importance of love, along with qualities associated with love. The conversation on love begins with a mention of the angels in verse 1 which states, “If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.” Love is presented with greater importance than speaking in the tongues of mortals and angels. The phrase tongues of angels could be a possible reference to an actual heavenly language, perhaps the spiritual

³¹ Janelle Peters, “Slavery and the Gendered Construction of Worship Veils in 1 Corinthians,” *Biblica* 101, no. 3 (2020): 431–443, <https://doi.org/10.2143/BIB.101.3.3288730>.

gift of speaking in tongues,³² or it might be rhetorical hyperbole.³³ Regardless of its initial meaning, it seems the text is attempting to encompass all forms of language. The rhetorical use of angels in association with language creates an extreme range of communication. In turn it reinforces the importance of the qualities of love in the following verses. By mentioning the angels and then describing the importance of love, the text establishes that qualities of love should be of greater importance to the Corinth congregation than spiritual gifts or understanding associated with angels.

Even if the Corinth community had a complete understanding of all supernatural angelic words, acts, and abilities; the implication is it would be nothing without love. Loving one another is presented with greater importance than the angels. Thus, as in the previous instances in 1 Corinthians, the angels serve to encourage the audience to foster relationships of unity amongst themselves. All four mentions of angels in 1 Corinthians remove the focus from supernatural mysticism of angels and instead the angels are utilized as tools to create unity in the congregation. The angels in Corinthians function to point towards relationships of unity, conduct, harmony, and love.

In Galatians 4:14 the text claims that the Galatians welcomed Paul as an angel of light. There is an insinuation that Paul was welcomed as a messenger by the Galatians community while he was in an unfavorable condition. Despite any issues surrounding Paul, the congregation accepted him and the message he delivered; thus, displaying kindness and true friendship.³⁴ An angelic mention in connection with acts of hospitality

³² For more on angelic languages, see John C. Poirier, *The Tongues of Angels: The Concept of Angelic Languages in Classical Jewish and Christian Texts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); for speaking in tongues see Mark J. Cartledge, *Speaking in Tongues: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2012).

³³ Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 492.

³⁴ Betz, *Galatians*, 224.

appears to be reminiscent of Genesis 18, in which Abraham welcomes angelic visitors with a meal and then receives a message from them.³⁵ Perhaps the text is alluding to this act of hospitality, since Abraham and the promises connected to him have been discussed in Galatians. If this is the case, then Paul's praise for the Galatians in connection with his angel-like treatment is possibly an encouragement to the congregation to continue to treat one another with kindness. The angelic mention in Galatians praises acts of hospitality; thus, fostering harmonious human relationships.

Angels Utilized to Provide Messages of Warning

The final category encompasses the majority of the angelic references in the epistles, which are mentions of angels utilized to provide messages of warning. The verses which fit into this section are: 2 Corinthians 11:14, Galatians 1:8, Colossians 2:18, 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 1 Timothy 5:21, 2 Peter 2:4, 2 Peter 2:11, and Jude 1:6. The utilization of angels for warning messages appears in a variety of scenarios and there is possible overlap with other categories. However, the primary focus in these verses appears to be the rhetorical utilization of angels to facilitate a type of warning.

The only mention of angels in 2 Corinthians is amongst a warning to the audience. 2 Corinthians 11:14 states, "And no wonder! Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." The text of 2 Corinthians exhibits a defense of Paul's ministry and reputation to the Corinth community. In chapter 11 there is a reference to super apostles

³⁵ For more on the angels of Genesis 18 and their reception, see Maria Doerfler, "Entertaining the Trinity Unawares: Genesis XVIII in Western Christian Interpretation," *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 65, no. 3 (2014): 485–503, doi:10.1017/S0022046914000621; and Michael B. Hundley, "Of God and Angels: Divine Messengers in Genesis and Exodus in their Ancient Near Eastern Contexts," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 67, no. 1 (2016): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/flw066>.

who have proclaimed a message different from Paul's gospel message. It is noted when Paul proclaimed the gospel it was done in a humble manner and free of charge. The implication is the accused super apostles have masqueraded as ministers of righteousness and presented an opposing gospel message in an opposite manner than Paul.³⁶ This leads to the super apostles being described as "false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ." After this description they are then compared to Satan, who disguises himself as an angel or messenger of light.³⁷ The word angel is mentioned in conjunction to Satan, its use in this verse is meant to elicit a negative reaction. Paul's opponents are being described as angels or messengers of light, but the text is clear this is not a compliment. This angelic description for the super apostles connects their message with deceit. Thus, the mention of angels in 2 Corinthians is utilized to create a warning for the Corinth community. In the same way the Corinth community would reject a message from Satan disguised as an angel of light; they are warned to reject the message of the super apostles.

Galatians 1:8 states, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed!" This verse presents a curse-like statement against a gospel different from the message Paul preached; the text employs language of a self-curse with the writer saying "we," which avoids directly cursing another, but presenting the idea that an opposing gospel is not to

³⁶ Victor Paul Furnish, *II Corinthians: Translated with Introduction, Notes and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), 510.

³⁷ For more on the figure of Satan in ancient Judaism and the New Testament, see Elaine H. Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (New York: 1995); Ryan E. Stokes, "Satan, YHWH's Executioner," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133, no. 2 (2014): 251-270, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jbl.2014.0019>; and Archie T. Wright, *The Origin of Evil Spirits: The Reception of Genesis 6:1-4 in Early Jewish Literature* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015).

be accepted.³⁸ Among this curse-like statement it is specified even angels that proclaim a different gospel will be subject to consequences. The inclusion of angels among the parties subject to the curse appears to implicate the magnitude of the curse; it is not just mortals who are affected for the implications extend to supernatural beings. If this curse can extend to the angels for delivering a different gospel message, then the importance of the first gospel message is emphasized in conjunction with a great warning to other people who would dare to proclaim an opposing message.

The previous gospel message is given a status even higher than a hypothetical message from an angel; thus, if an angel were to ever appear to this crowd miraculously with a different message they are cursed. If a heavenly being's message can face this scrutiny, then how much more a message from another human. If a heavenly being is subject to a curse, then the implication is a human message could be subject to a curse. Thus, the mention of angels serves to demonstrate a warning for following or proclaiming an alternate gospel message.

Colossians 2 presents an argument against man-made regulations and advocates perfection can be found in Christ. Within this warning against regulations is a reference to angel worship. Colossians 2:18 condemns the practice of worshiping angels, along with dwelling on visions, and self-abasement. The mention of angels in this epistle is attached to a list of cultic-like practices to avoid.³⁹ The congregation is encouraged to avoid man-made practices and to remain firm in their faith. An implication throughout

³⁸ Betz, *Galatians*, 53.

³⁹ Eduard Lohse, *Colossians and Philemon: A Commentary on the Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 118.

Colossians is authority, and the fullness of God can be found in Christ.⁴⁰ If Christ is the ultimate authority and all fulfillment can be found in him, then avoiding cultic-like practices is an instruction the audience should follow. Thus, the condemnation of angel worship serves as a warning to other cultic practices that may be imposed on the congregation.⁴¹

The introduction to 2 Thessalonians describes a future judgement day in which those who have persecuted the congregation will be afflicted. In this message of vindication is an image of a victorious Christ who will be revealed in heaven with mighty angels to inflict vengeance on those who do not obey the gospel of Christ. The chapter implies there is a punishment for those who do not heed the gospel. The angels are mentioned as accompanying Christ at the time of this judgment. This revealing of Christ with the angels in heaven appears to be referring to a future event; however, the primary focus leans into warning. The epistle to the Thessalonians is to a persecuted audience and the warning is for the aggressors of the congregation.⁴² The warning of future vindication against their persecutors offers hope for a type of future judgment. Thus, the angels in 2 Thessalonians appear to offer hope while being a part of a warning message of future judgement.

1 Timothy 5 offers a list of instructions to the congregation. In verse 21 it states these ordinances are presented with God, Jesus, and the angels as witnesses. The implication is these instructions are of such importance, they are ordained through the

⁴⁰ Roy R. Jeal, "Starting Before the Beginning: Precreation Discourse in Colossians," *Religion and Theology* 18, no. 3-4 (2011): 287-310, <https://doi.org/10.1163/157430111X614745>.

⁴¹ For more on angel worship in Colossians, see Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Tübingen: WUNT 70, 1995).

⁴² Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 351.

presence of divine observers. Furthermore, the text states, “I warn you to keep these instructions without prejudice.” 1 Timothy informs the audience these divine overseers have borne witness to this warning accompanying these church instructions. The angels function as a part of the warning for encouraging the audience to remain faithful to the presented instructions.

In Jude the angels are included in a threefold example with the Exodus generation and the people of Sodom. This group of three serves as an example of the transgressions committed by the intruders which Jude warns against. The verse that specifically references the angels states, “And the angels who did not keep their own position, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great day.” This verse is a reference to the story of the fallen angels that interacted with humanity, which can be found in Genesis 6:1-4 and 1 Enoch 6-16.⁴³ The use of the Exodus generation, the fallen angels, and people of Sodom appear to indicate the main offense of Jude’s intruders was transgressing boundaries.⁴⁴ The angels of Genesis 6 desired women, while the inhabitants of Sodom desired the angels which visited Lot. The implication is the intruders of Jude appear to cross the boundaries set by the author of this epistle, the congregation, or God. Thus, angels are utilized as an example of the transgression of the intruders. If the intruders are compared to these fallen angels, and the fallen angels have suffered judgement, then the intruders will also encounter a similar

⁴³ For studies on fallen angels in relation to the Book of the Watchers, see Maxwell J. Davidson, *Angels at Qumran: A Comparative Study of 1 Enoch 1-36; 72-108 and Sectarian Writings from Qumran* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1992); Michael E. Stone, "Enoch and The Fall of the Angels: Teaching and Status", *Dead Sea Discoveries* 22, no. 3 (2015): 342-357, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15685179-12341366>; and Angela Kim Harkins, Kelley Coblenz Bautch, and John C. Endres, *The Watchers in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2014).

⁴⁴ Jörg Frey, *The Letter of Jude and the Second Letter of Peter: A Theological Commentary* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2018), 86-90.

fate. Thus, the angels have been used rhetorically in a threefold pattern as a narrative warning of judgement.

In 2 Peter there are two instances of the angels being utilized in warning messages. The first mention is 2 Peter 2:4 which states, “For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of deepest darkness to be kept until the judgment.” The angels are used as an example of the punishment that awaits the false teachers who have infiltrated the congregation. This is similar to Jude 1:6, which presents a warning against the intruders with a reference to the fallen angels. However, there are differences, the material of Jude appears to allude to 1 Enoch, while 2 Peter omits references to 1 Enoch.⁴⁵ Instead 2 Peter states these fallen angels are cast into “Tartarus” a Greek allusion to the underworld. It is possible the author of 2 Peter is writing to a multicultural audience, so he invokes a Greek narrative of punishment.⁴⁶ Furthermore, 2 Peter may avoid a reference to 1 Enoch because the text could be referencing blasphemous angels, rather than the watchers of 1 Enoch.⁴⁷ In the Book of the Watchers it is the sin of the angels which leads to the flood; however, 2 Peter listed the sin of the angels and the flood as two different events.⁴⁸ Perhaps, 2 Peter does not quote 1 Enoch like Jude, because it is possible the text is not drawing from the Book of the Watchers. Regardless of the reference, the implication is similar to Jude; the false teachers will face judgement for their misguiding ways. Thus, the rhetorical use of angels serves as a warning against the message of the false teachers.

⁴⁵Jerome H. Neyrey, *2 Peter, Jude: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 197.

⁴⁶ Neyrey, *2 Peter and Jude*, 197.

⁴⁷ Kim Papaioannou, "The Sin of the Angels in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 140, no. 2 (2021): 391-408, <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1402.2021.9>.

⁴⁸ Papaioannou, "The Sin of the Angels," 400.

The second occurrence of angels in 2 Peter 2:10-11 notes the false teachers have slandered the glorious ones; the text states, “Bold and willful, they are not afraid to slander the glorious ones, whereas angels, though greater in might and power, do not bring against them a slanderous judgment from the Lord.” The false teachers appear to believe they are exempt from judgment, it is possible their act of slander is against the final judgement of God, an event often associated with angels.⁴⁹ The implication is the angels and events associated with them should be revered to a certain extent. Thus, this serves as an example of punishment for the false teachers and a warning to the audience not to slander angels. Furthermore, it is noted angels do not participate in acts of slander. This furthers the implication the audience should not engage in slander. If the mighty and powerful angels do not engage in this act, then neither should the intended audience. The audience should not follow the false teachers that lead to destruction but should follow the example of the powerful angels who refuse to slander. Thus, the angels have been utilized in 2 Peter as examples for humanity; for if they heed the example of the angels, they can avoid the punishment attached to the warning message. The audience is warned that the teachings of the false teachers lead to a punishment similar to the fallen angels.

Conclusion

This analysis of angels in the epistles demonstrates the angels have been utilized to describe humanity’s relationship with God, to elevate Christ and his message, to promote peaceful human relations, and to provide messages of warning. Furthermore, it demonstrates in the above epistles, angels are seldom mentioned and do not introduce the

⁴⁹ Neyrey, *2 Peter and Jude*, 213.

major points of the epistles. They are mentioned to uphold or legitimize a claim, but the introduction of these epistles is not dependent on the example of angels. The New Testament epistles utilized the angels in a manner different from the epistle to the Hebrews, which will be demonstrated in the following chapter.

Chapter III.

Angels in the Epistle to the Hebrews

Introduction

The verses concerning angels in Hebrews could be separated into the above categories; however, different categories are better suited for Hebrews. I suggest this for two reasons, the first is the difference of the utilization between Hebrews and the other epistles. The other New Testament epistles utilized angels sparsely, and only at certain points to uphold, or connect to a previously already established claim. By contrast, in the epistle to the Hebrews angels are mentioned with great frequency in the introduction. Secondly, the angels in Hebrews introduce major theological points that are expanded on later in the letter. From the first mention of angels in Hebrews, they are operating in a different function from the previous New Testament epistles. The categories in which angels are utilized in Hebrews include, angels utilized to elevate Christ, angels utilized to define humanity, and angels utilized to point towards a hopeful future. These are three areas in Hebrews that are not a singular point, but these are ideas woven throughout the text, and its conception begins with the angels in chapters one and two of Hebrews.

To properly discuss the uniqueness of angels in Hebrews, a brief overview on major theological points in the epistle will be useful. The epistle to the Hebrews is written to a persecuted audience.⁵⁰ The main objective is to encourage this audience to endure

⁵⁰ James W. Thompson, *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 8.

and remain faithful even in the face of hardship.⁵¹ The encouragement to remain perseverant is discussed through the concept of a new covenant that contains salvation and leads to rest. The text presents this proposed new covenant with a promised future through a set of comparisons. Since Hebrews' new covenant concept is connected to the message of Christ, the method of comparison between Jesus and biblical figures, rituals, or systems lead the conversation. Jesus is compared to Moses, Aaron, the Levitical priesthood, and animal sacrifice. Among these series of comparisons, the angels are also mentioned. The method of comparison begins the introduction to Hebrews with Jesus and the angels.

Through these comparisons the argument for a new covenant in Hebrews is presented, the text of Hebrews argues a new covenant is possible because it was previously promised.⁵² The claim in Hebrews is that Jesus is the high priest and sacrifice which activated this new covenant. While Jesus is compared to biblical figures, the intent is for Jesus to appear as a perfect high priest who relates to humanity and can now offer a sacrifice that requires no repetition. According to Hebrews Jesus is a perfect high priest and can offer a future of rest, fulfilling the promises of the old covenant. It is important to note the claims for a new covenant do not invalidate or undervalue what Hebrews presents as the old covenant. The text of Hebrews supports all its proposed new covenant claims on the ideas of what the text of Hebrews considers the old covenant; thus, the new covenant of Hebrews is presented as a continuation. For it is older Jewish scriptures that define and set the parameters for a discussion regarding a new covenant in the text of

⁵¹ Verses which encourage faithfulness, endurance, perseverance, and to hold fast include Hebrews 2:1, 3:6, 3:12, 3:14, 4:14, 6:1, 10:23, 10:35, 12:1, 12:7, and 13:1.

⁵² Hebrews 9:15 claims Jesus is the mediator of a new covenant and is an allusion to Jeremiah 31:30 which states, "The days are coming," declares the Lord, "when I will make a new covenant."

Hebrews. These comparisons serve to elevate the message of Christ, which in turn validate the previous biblical message, for they must be legitimate in order to contend for the validity of Christ.

This method of comparisons that circulates throughout the whole epistle is a representation of epideictic and deliberative rhetoric. There are sections of epideictic syncrisis which compare a Hebrews old covenant area to a topic in Hebrews proposed new covenant. These sections of comparative epideictic syncrisis then support the deliberative claims of Hebrews.⁵³ It is the sections of deliberative rhetoric supported through epideictic syncrisis which encourage and warn the audience to remain faithful even through persecution.⁵⁴

In the series of epideictic comparisons, it is the angels that begin the conversation. It is through angelic comparison that the first deliberative encouragement to remain faithful is presented to the persecuted audience of Hebrews. The conversation of a new covenant in Hebrews first relies on the angels. The comparison between Christ and the angels presents at its core an argument that fits into “if x was valid then y is even more valid” formula. Although the angels assist in supporting Hebrews first deliberative claim, they also set the foundation for future claims in Hebrews. The remainder of the book of Hebrews will compare Christ to other biblical figures, encourage humanity to remain faithful, and point towards a future of hope. All these claims are introduced to the audience of Hebrews through the angelic opening of the epistle. In the introduction of

⁵³ Michael W. Martin and Jason A. Whitlark “Choosing What Is Advantageous: The Relationship Between Epideictic and Deliberative Syncrisis in Hebrews,” *New Testament Studies* 58, no. 3 (2012): 379–400, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688512000057>.

⁵⁴ Martin, Whitlark “Choosing What Is Advantageous: The Relationship Between Epideictic and Deliberative Syncrisis in Hebrews,” 399.

Hebrews consisting of chapters one and two, Christ who is the main figure of comparison is introduced and his nature is presented to the audience. Second, humanity is encouraged to remain faithful while discussing the angels. Third, the first indication of a future hope is mentioned in conjunction with the angels. It is the angels which introduce three claims of importance to Hebrews.

The following will demonstrate how angels are utilized to define and shape these three areas in the introduction, which then sets the foundation for claims throughout the remainder of the epistle. All thirteen verses that mention angels in the epistle to the Hebrews will be separated and discussed in the following three categories: angels utilized to introduce Christ; angels utilized to encourage humanity; and angels utilized to point towards the future. It is important to note these three categories do have areas of overlap and certain verses may be referred to more than once. Despite some dual utilization, all thirteen verses that reference angels in Hebrews, address one of these three categories in some capacity.

Angels Utilized to Introduce Christ

In Hebrews, Christ is presented as sitting at the right hand of God, as a heavenly high priest in the lineage of Melchizedek, the mediator of a new covenant, and the ideal sacrifice. The foundation for the identity of Christ is laid in the first two chapters through the use of the angels. The following verses reference angels and define the nature of Christ: Hebrews 1:4, 1:5, 1:6, 1:7, 1:13, 2:2, and 2:9.

The introduction of Hebrews is quick to refer to the angels as the first mention is found in verse 4, the verses prior to this in conjunction with the angels define Christ as God's communicator. Hebrews 1:1-4 states,

Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made 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.

The opening of Hebrews introduces Jesus through modes of communication. God has spoken through "various ways by the prophets" and now God speaks through the Son. Furthermore, the Son is defined as the exact imprint of God and connected to creation. Finally, the Son is referred to as superior to the angels, for he has inherited a more excellent name. This first passage presents Christ as the mode of communication between God and humanity;⁵⁵ thus, setting the stage for the latter conversation of Christ as mediator⁵⁶ and high priest.⁵⁷ His qualifications as a communicator are amplified through the statement, that he is superior to the angels. This is significant because angels have a history as messengers.⁵⁸ In the Hebrew Bible and the gospels there is narratives of angels delivering messages on behalf of God.⁵⁹ However, in Hebrews it is Jesus who is now God's divine messenger. The angels are utilized to refer to Christ as the superior messenger.

⁵⁵ Alan C. Mitchell, *Hebrews* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007), 40.

⁵⁶ Hebrews 8:6 and Hebrews 9:15.

⁵⁷ Verses that discuss Jesus as a high priest include, Hebrews 3:1, 4:14, 5:5-6, 5:10, 6:20, and 7:26.

⁵⁸ For studies on angels as messengers of God, see Michael B. Hundley, "Of God and Angels: Divine Messengers in Genesis and Exodus in their Ancient Near Eastern Contexts," *The Journal of Theological Studies*, 67, no. 1 (2016): 1–22, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/flw066>; and Camilla Hélena von Heijne, *The Messenger of the Lord in Early Jewish Interpretations of Genesis* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010)

⁵⁹ Examples from the Hebrew Bible regarding angelic messengers, include divine messengers delivering the news of Issac's birth to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18; the angel of the Lord delivering instructions to Joshua in Joshua 5; and the archangel Michael appearing to Daniel after a time of prayer in Daniel 12. Examples in the New Testament include the angel Gabriel appearing to Mary with the announcement of Jesus' birth in Luke 2 and an angel appearing to Joseph with a message of warning in Matthew 2.

The text then offers a brief explanation for why Christ is the superior messenger. Previous to this statement there could already be an argument for this, Christ has been referred to as being present since creation and in the image of God. However, the argument for Christ being above the angels is on the basis of name; Christ has inherited a more excellent name than the angels. The more excellent name that Christ has inherited appears to be the royal title of Son,⁶⁰ which will be elaborated on in later verses within the introductory chapters. However, the implication for the title of royal Son in just this opening passage could be supported by the list of qualifications applied to the Son so far, which are: the heir of all things, a reflection of God's glory, the exact imprint of God, sustains all things through his powerful word, made purification for sins, and seated at the right hand of God. It is after these qualifications the Son is declared as superior to the angels because of his more excellent name. This first comparative statement between the Son and the angels has introduced the communicator of Hebrews' new covenant. Several additional verses referring to the angels will continue to define the Son.

Through the comparison with angels, the Son has been introduced as a royal communicator, this position and other attributes will continue to be defined through comparison with the angels in the following passage of Hebrews 1:5-7,

For to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you"? Or again, "I will be his Father, and he will be my 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 servants flames of fire.

Verse 5 appears to be a reference to two passages from the Septuagint, Psalms 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:14. Both passages have royal connotations; thus, furthering the earlier

⁶⁰ Kenneth L. Schenck, "A Celebration of the Enthroned Son: The Catena of Hebrews 1," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120, no. 3 (2001): 469–485, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3267903>.

implications the title of Son is the inherited more excellent name not assigned to the angels. Furthermore, both passages acknowledge the reign of a king, and God has some form of communication with this king. Thus, God's communication is being delivered to a royal figure, and it appears the same sentiment is being invoked when speaking of the Son in Hebrews.

Psalms 2 is a royal psalm that reenacts a coronation ceremony in which God appoints and anoints a king who is treated as a son.⁶¹ When read in conjunction with the question of Hebrews, "for to which of the angels did God ever say, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you?" infers there is a point to be made on the topic of angels, since Psalms 2 does not mention angels. It is Hebrews that introduces angels to the quotation of Psalms 2; linking the Son to a royal psalm establishes there is a difference between the Son and the angels. The Son is placed in a position of royalty, while later in chapter one the angels will be placed in a position of service. It may imply the angels are not capable of being in a place of kingship, because the kings spoken to in Psalms 2 and 2 Samuel 7 are both human. Although the statement of Hebrews 1:5 is presenting claims on the Son, it could infer the angels are not royal and not human, both qualifications assigned to the Son throughout Hebrews.⁶² Thus, this statement would be utilizing the angels to define Christ and his humanity.

The reference of 2 Samuel 7:14 provides a scope for the longevity of the Son's kingdom. In this passage of scripture, God communicates a message to the prophet Nathan concerning David. God says he will establish his kingship forever and David will

⁶¹ Konrad Schaefer, *Psalms* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001), 8.

⁶² Verses that address the royal nature of Christ include Hebrews 7:1-3 and 10:12-13. Verses that discuss the humanity of Christ include Hebrews 2:14, 2:17-18, and 4:15.

be his son.⁶³ The words of 2 Samuel are used in reference to King David; however, Hebrews utilizes them to describe Jesus. Connecting the Son with David infers Jesus is a king-like son figure with an everlasting kingdom. The angels are injected into these verses to amplify the kingship of Christ. As the text indicates, this bestowment of a forever kingship is for the Son.

Furthermore, the royal connections to the title of Son appears to indicate that Sonship is not a position for the angels, this is reinforced when the angels are referred to as servants in verse 7. The text is making claims about Christ; however, it utilizes the angels to support these claims. The text could have simply stated the Son was the royal mediator of a new covenant, instead the text compares the Son to angels in its introduction. The passages from the Septuagint are reimagined and utilized with mentions of angels to create an image of an eternal royal son.

The definition of Christ in a royal position continues in verse 6 which declares, “Let all God’s angels worship him.” This could possibly be an allusion to Deuteronomy 32:43 or Psalms 97:7. In either instance the interpretation of Hebrews has appropriated some liberties with this particular quotation. Deuteronomy and Psalms use a variation of divine council language, with Deuteronomy saying, “Praise, O heavens, his people; worship him, all you gods!” In comparison Psalms states, “All servants of images are put to shame, those who make their boast in worthless idols; all gods bow down before him.” Both sources use the term gods, while the epistle to the Hebrews inserts the word angels. The text has established not only is Christ a king, but the angels worship him. The angels are being utilized to elevate Christ as worthy of worship. If even the angels worship the

⁶³ Craig E. Morrison, *2 Samuel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2013), 101.

Son, then the implication is the audience of Hebrews should reverence the message of the Son as well.

Verse 7 offers more distinctions between the Son and the angels. It appears to present the physical-like nature of angels, which may serve to further the argument the Son is in the image of God and like humanity.⁶⁴ The implication being angels could not attain a royal or messianic position like the Son, for they do not possess human qualities. The quote alluded to in this verse is from Psalms 104:4 which states, “you make the winds your messengers, fire and flame your ministers.” This describes God in creative action over the heavens, in this majestic process the angels are defined as servants⁶⁵ in the heavenly court.⁶⁶ Hebrews transfers the servitude of the angels from God to Christ. The angels of wind and flame serve the Son who is created in the image of God.

Verse 13 further emphasizes kingship with the asking of another question which states, “But to which of the angels has he ever said, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet?” Through a hypothetical question concerning angels the audience is presented with a royal son that has victory over enemies. The Septuagint quotation for this verse is taken from Psalms 110:1, and it is referenced again throughout Hebrews.⁶⁷ This is a royal psalm that depicts a king in a co-enthronement with God.⁶⁸ However, this king appears to encapsulate a priestly role, since verse four

⁶⁴ Verses that discuss the humanity of Christ include Hebrews 2:14, 2:17-18, and 4:15.

⁶⁵ Klaus Baltzer, et al, *Psalms 3: A Commentary on Psalms 101-150* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2011), 49.

⁶⁶ For further studies regarding a Heavenly Court, Temple, or Tabernacle, see Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Eyal Regev and John Collins, *The Temple in Early Christianity: Experiencing the Sacred* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

⁶⁷ Psalms 110:1 is alluded to in Hebrews 8:1, 10:12, and 12:2. Other allusions to Psalms 110 in Hebrews include Hebrews 5:6, 6:20, 7:17, 7:21, and 10:13.

⁶⁸ Baltzer, *Psalms 3*, 147.

states this king is a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek. This theme of a priestly king is important to Hebrews, and this verse is later referenced in Hebrews 5:6. The inclusion of Psalms 110 in chapter 1 serves as an avenue for invoking thoughts of a priest-like king. This psalm reinforces the idea that God is in a relationship with humanity. God appoints a human king to be victorious and to be a priest. The Son is a king and a priest that is exalted, and the angels are utilized to discuss these characteristics of the Son.

The Son is placed in a royal position at the right hand of God and his enemies are at his feet. Later in chapter 2 it states Jesus has the power to destroy the devil.⁶⁹ The Son being victorious over enemies appears to be an important part of his character. The observation of the enemies as the footstool of the Son indicates it is the Son who conquers evil and not angels, like in the books of Daniel and Tobit.⁷⁰ In Hebrews the angels do not engage with enemies, yet the Son is described as victorious against his enemy the devil. Thus, this verse utilizes the angels to allude to royal and priestly claims that will be referenced in Hebrews later.⁷¹

The second chapter of Hebrews includes two more verses that utilize the angels to discuss and introduce characteristics of the Son. These verses are Hebrews 2:2 and Hebrews 2:9. The first occurrence of angels amplifies and stresses the importance of the message of Christ. While the second mention of angels relates Jesus to humanity through the connections of suffering, glory, and honor.

⁶⁹ Hebrews 2:14.

⁷⁰ Daniel 10 and Tobit 8:3.

⁷¹ Verses that discuss Jesus as a priest, include Hebrews 3:1, 4:14, 5:5-6, 5:10, 6:20, and 7:26.

Chapter 2 begins with an admonition to the audience of Hebrews to pay greater attention to what they have heard. Thus, the previous sets of quotations that included angelic mentions were meant to uphold and relate to the message which should be heeded. In verses 2 and 3 the message is identified as the gospel of Christ, it states,

For if the message declared through angels was valid, and every transgression or disobedience received a just penalty, how can we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? It was declared at first through the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him.

From this statement we can assume the earlier conversation between the Son and angels was meant to reflect positively on both parties, despite the fact there were noticeable differences between them. The claim is that the angels' message was positive; angels are not being disregarded, instead their message is being validated.

Some scholars have commented this message from the angels is the Torah⁷² based on Acts 7:53, Galatians 3:10, and Jewish scriptures⁷³ such as the book of Jubilees;⁷⁴ however, the text of Hebrews never explicitly states this message from the angels is the Torah. It is only described as a valid message from the angels and alluded to having connections to salvation. Furthermore, later in the book of Hebrews it insinuates the sacrifices under the Torah could not provide salvation.⁷⁵ If ritual sacrifice could not provide salvation and the angels delivered a valid message with connections to salvation, it appears the Torah and the message of the angels may be two different messages.

⁷² Thompson, *Hebrews*, 58-59.

⁷³ Studies on angels being involved when the Torah was given to Moses include Hindy Najman, "Angels At Sinai: Exegesis, Theology And Interpretive Authority," *Dead Sea Discoveries: A Journal of Current Research on the Scrolls and Related Literature* 7, no. 3 (2000): 313-333, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156851700509977>; and Joseph P. Schultz, "Angelic Opposition to the Ascension of Moses and the Revelation of the Law," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 61, no. 4 (1971): 282-307, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1453673>.

⁷⁴ Harold W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 64-65.

⁷⁵ Hebrews 10:1-4.

Regardless of the true identity of the angels' message, its status as valid amplifies the message of Christ.

This verse endorsed the idea that not adhering to the message of Jesus may result in punishment because there was a type of penalty for refusing the message of the angels. This theme of punishment in not adhering to the message is later emphasized in Hebrews 4 and mentioned in other places of Hebrews. The idea there is a penalty for disobeying Jesus' message and the angels' message appear to give the same level of validation to both messages. The message of the angels may not be the message for the persecuted Hebrews congregation, but it was a valid message for those who may have received it. The fact that the angels' previous message is being validated demonstrates a respect for all former communication from God. If the angels' message was valid then all former communication from God can be used to validate the message of Jesus.

The final verse that utilizes angels to describe Christ is Hebrews 2:9 which states, "but we do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone." Jesus is referred to being made lower than the angels for a little while, this appears to insinuate Jesus on earth was below the angels. However, Jesus is now crowned with glory and honor, a distinction also applied to humanity in verse 8. The designation of glory and honor appear to be given to Christ because he has suffered death. For Jesus' death was not an endpoint; rather, it was a noble act with benefits for all.⁷⁶ It appears Jesus is now crowned because of the suffering of death he experienced. This may be in relation to the persecuted audience; perhaps, they

⁷⁶ David A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle "to the Hebrews"* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 110-111.

can anticipate a future reward or recognition for remaining faithful during persecution. If Jesus' suffering resulted in being crowned with glory and honor, possibly their suffering will result in a similar manner.

Furthermore, it appears the text is demonstrating Jesus is a messiah figure and the ability to die is a defining factor. Indicating an angel could not be a messiah figure since angels could not die. However, Hebrews is not just arguing for a messiah, it is arguing for a messiah that is both king and high priest.⁷⁷ It is through these roles the text constantly connects Jesus with humanity. As if Jesus is able to only fulfill these roles for, he has endured the suffering of humanity and has known death; both attributes that are not assigned to the angels in Hebrews.

This may suggest angels do not know the suffering of death; thus, could not fully relate to humanity as a messiah figure. It could also be attempting to assert Jesus is not an angel; he is the Son of God who fulfills the roles of messiah, high priest, and king, all at once. Thus, the angels in these verses were utilized to discuss how Christ is like humanity. This is a topic that will reappear throughout the epistle to the Hebrews, and it was first introduced through angelic mentions.⁷⁸

Through these verses that mention angels, the nature of Christ has been defined as having a royal title, being appointed the son of God, a royal high priest crowned with glory, with an eternal kingdom that includes angels which worship and serve him. Two possible arguments for these distinctions in the opening verses in Hebrews, could be claims against Christ being an angel or a condemnation of angel worship.

⁷⁷ Hebrews 7:1-3.

⁷⁸ Verses that discuss the humanity of Christ include Hebrews 2:14, 2:17-18, and 4:15.

A possible interpretation is that the text of Hebrews is addressing angelomorphic Christology. A heavenly figure and a messenger of God are attributes of an angel. Furthermore, in Second Temple Judaism there were associations of messiah motifs with angels. The phrase “son of man” does not appear in Hebrews, but it was associated with Jesus in the gospels and had connections to angel Christology.⁷⁹ The epistle to the Hebrews is not a product of Second Temple Judaism; however, it was written in a time period that included several fractions of Judaism. By beginning the text with clear statements of difference between Christ and the angels, this might have been an attempt to dissipate any confusion between Christ, the angels, and a messiah figure that is connected with angels. This would assert the contrast between Christ and the angels is meant to display the uniqueness of Jesus; thus, asserting Christ is not an angel.⁸⁰ However, the text never outright states Christ is not an angel, simply he is superior to the angels. Furthermore, an argument can be made that “the author embraced Angelomorphic Christology as support for the superiority of Christ.”⁸¹ It is possible the text of Hebrews leaned into angelic language to describe Christ in order to present him as a heavenly being worthy of mediating a covenant. Regardless of the true intent, both a rejection and acceptance of angelomorphic Christology rhetorically utilizes the angels to describe the nature of Christ.

Secondly, there is a possibility this clear distinction between the angels and Christ was a condemnation of angel worship. If Christ is superior to the angels and the angels

⁷⁹ Gabriele Boccaccini, “Jesus the Messiah: Man, Angel or God? The Jewish Roots of Early Christology.” *Annali Di Scienze Religiose* 4 (2011): 193–220, <https://doi.org/10.1484/j.asr.1.102573>.

⁸⁰ Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 50-54.

⁸¹ Charles A. Gieschen, *Angelomorphic Christology: Antecedents and Early Evidence* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2017), 314.

are in service to Christ, then the angels are not to be worshiped. However, the text of Hebrews never explicitly states not to worship angels.⁸² The angels are servants of Christ and worship the Son, but the attitude of humanity towards the angels is not defined. Furthermore, Colossians 2:18 which was examined earlier provided a clear example of a condemnation of angel worship. It appears if the text of Hebrews desired to condemn angel worship, it would have appeared plainly in the text. Thus, the contrast of Christ and angels may not be a condemnation of angel worship; nevertheless, it still serves to define the characteristics of Christ.

Regardless of the true intent in the contrast between Christ and the angels, the result is the angels are being rhetorically utilized to discuss his nature. Christ is a royal priestly communicator who is called Son, designations that do not pertain to the angels. These distinctions are important since they affect the other arguments in the epistle. Throughout Hebrews, Christ is said to be the guarantee of a better covenant,⁸³ and a perfect high priest.⁸⁴ By defining Christ as the Son of God and different than the angels, the argument of Hebrews is supported. It is through this angelic introduction that the audience begins to know the mediator of the new covenant. The angels have been utilized to introduce the nature of Christ that will be reflected throughout the remainder of the epistle to the Hebrews.

⁸² Loren T. Stuckenbruck, *Angel Veneration and Christology: A Study in Early Judaism and in the Christology of the Apocalypse of John* (Tübingen: WUNT 70, 1995), 126.

⁸³ Hebrews 7:22.

⁸⁴ Hebrews 7:26-28.

Angels Utilized to Encourage Humanity

The angels in Hebrews are utilized to encourage humanity. Through this conversation about angels the audience learns angels serve those who inherit salvation, humanity is a little lower than the angels, the Son has come to help humanity, and acts of hospitality can have heavenly implications. The audience of Hebrews is facing persecution and through this discussion on the angels, they can observe their placement in the cosmos. The verses in the epistle to Hebrews that utilize angels to encourage humanity are: Hebrews 1:14, 2:6-8, 2:16, and 13:2.

The final verse of chapter 1 presents a question as it begins to discuss humanity, it states, “Are not all angels spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?” First the text assigns angels as spirits; throughout Hebrews there is a theme of associating the Son with humanity, so the designation of angels as spirits furthers the idea of a difference between the Son and angels. However, this distinction does not just affect Jesus, it is relevant to humanity. This verse claims angels and humanity are different; due to this distinction, there are different roles for both parties. In this case the audience is informed the angels are in service to them.

The phrase “those who are to inherit salvation” is a mark of identity for the audience of Hebrews. The verses prior to this discuss the Son and angels through heavenly language. It is with this verse the audience learns their role in this situation, that they are the inheritors of salvation.⁸⁵ The word inherit is applied to those who receive the Son’s salvation message, and Hebrews 1:3 describes Jesus as the heir of all things. This is a connection between the Son and his closeness to humanity. The Son has inherited all

⁸⁵ Thompson, *Hebrews*, 56.

things from God, and now humanity inherits salvation from the Son. Furthermore, like the angels serve the Son, they also serve humanity; furthering, the similarities between humanity and the Son. Thus, the angels are utilized to encourage humanity, for they are able to inherit the salvation message of Christ.

Hebrews 2:6-8 continues the theme of referring to angels in order to define and encourage humanity, it states,

But someone has testified somewhere, “What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them? You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, subjecting all things under their feet.

The use of “someone has testified somewhere” is interesting based on traditions associated with the creation of humanity and the ascent of Moses which associate this quote with an angelic speaker;⁸⁶ however, in Hebrews that connection is avoided. The text of Sanhedrin 38b which details the creation of humanity quotes Psalms 8, and has similarities to Hebrews, it states,

The angels said before him: Master of the Universe: “What is man that You are mindful of him? And the son of man that You think of him?” (Psalms 8:5), i.e., a creature such as this is not worth creating. God outstretched His small finger among them and burned them with fire. And the same occurred with a second group of angels. The third group of angels that He asked said before Him: Master of the Universe, the first two groups who spoke their mind before You, what did they accomplish? The entire world is Yours; whatever You wish to do in Your world, do. God then created the first person.⁸⁷

Despite other Jewish traditions of Psalms 8 being clearly associated with an angelic speaker the reference in Hebrews remains ambiguous. Throughout these two

⁸⁶ Georg Gäbel, "Rivals in Heaven: Angels in the Epistle to the Hebrews," *Deuterocanonical and Cognate Literature Yearbook* 2007, no. 2007 (2007): 357-376, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110192957.4.35>

⁸⁷ Translation from Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz, Tzvi Hersh Weinreb, Shalom Z. Berger, and Joshua Schreier, *Koren Talmud Bavli Volume 29. Sanhedrin Part 1* (Jerusalem: Koren Publishers, 2012).

chapters there have been several verses associated with angels; the inclusion of another would not have been out of place. The possibility exists that Hebrews is attempting to distance this quote from angelic association since, “someone somewhere” in Hebrews appears to denote a human speaker.

If this is a human speaker, it suggests humanity or at least this speaker is in awe of the magnitude of God and possibly the universe. Thus, placing themselves in a position lower than God and celestial beings. However, the phrase “you have made them for a little while lower than the angels” suggests one day the status of angels and humanity will be different. This may relate to Hebrews 2:5, which notes the coming world is not subject to angels. If the coming world is subject to humanity and the angels are subject to the human-like Son, it is possible the angels will be subject to humanity.

If “someone somewhere” is an angelic speaker, it could suggest angels having a rivalry with humanity. Since, the angelic speaker is opposed to the creation of humanity and humanity obtaining the law.⁸⁸ Thus, if Hebrews associated this phrase with an angel, it would invoke connotations of possible discontentment, anger, or jealousy from the angels, who thus far have been described as in service to the Son, God, and humanity. It appears Hebrews wishes to avoid the image of the angels disagreeing with God, since the angels have been presented in a positive light.

This verse also suggests a hierarchy between the Son, angels, and humanity. However, the designation that humans are a little lower than the angels does not seem to be degrading, because humanity is then described as crowned with glory and honor, with all things subject under their feet. So, if there is a hierarchy, even if humanity is lower

⁸⁸ Joseph P. Schultz, “Angelic Opposition to the Ascension of Moses and the Revelation of the Law,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 61, no. 4 (1971): 282–307, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1453673>.

than the angels, they are still described in terms that appear powerful with the implication humanity has dominion over the world.⁸⁹ Although the language suggests a hierarchical system, it appears “lower than the angels” could be interpreted as a term to highlight a difference between humanity and the angels. The assignment of being lower may not appear like an encouraging message; however, the text then applies glory and honor to humanity. Thus, the angels are utilized to remind humanity regardless of their place in the cosmic scheme, like the Son they are crowned with glory and honor.

Hebrews 2:16 states, “For it is clear that he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham.” This verse implies Christ and all he has to offer is for humanity. Just as God was faithful to Abraham, the Son will be faithful to the audience of Hebrews.⁹⁰ The verses before this present the sanctification of humanity through the death of Jesus. Connecting the angels to a promised sanctification for humanity is a reminder that the promises offered through the Son are available to humanity. Christ’s salvation message and sanctification are not hidden away with angels in a heavenly realm, they are described as accessible to humanity. Thus, the angels are utilized in the passage to remind the audience of Hebrews to remain faithful in their current persecuted state for there is still the promise of salvation.

The final occurrence between humanity and the angels is found in Hebrews 13, which is not in the introduction of Hebrews, but it introduces favorability towards acts of hospitality in the conclusion of the epistle. Hebrews 13:2 states, “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.” This mention of angels serves to facilitate hospitality between humanity. This verse is

⁸⁹ Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 71.

⁹⁰ Thompson, *Hebrews*, 76.

an encouragement to treat strangers with kindness as they could be a heavenly guest. This appears to be an allusion to Genesis 18 in which Abraham received angelic visitors and prepared them a meal. After this act of hospitality, the angelic visitors then bestowed on Abraham the news of his future son. If the implication to treat strangers with hospitality is connected to Genesis 18, then the text silently implies that a blessing might accompany the act of hospitality.

However, a blessing for engaging in good works does not appear to be the focus of this angelic mention. The verses before and after Hebrews 3:2 advocate for the treatment of love and compassion towards humanity. Connecting the angels to acts of hospitality demonstrates that for the text of Hebrews building community is of great importance.⁹¹ Thus, the angels are utilized to encourage humanity to act towards one another with hospitality.

These four passages concerning humanity and the angels have demonstrated Hebrews utilized the angels to define and encourage humanity. First, the persecuted audience could find comfort in knowing they had inherited salvation, and the angels could assist them. Second, through the discussion of angels, humanity learned of their place in the cosmos, and like Christ they could be crowned with glory and honor. Thirdly, the angels were utilized to encourage the persecuted congregation that Jesus had come to help them. Finally, the angels were utilized to remind the congregation to build community with strangers through acts of hospitality.

⁹¹ Craig F. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 555.

Angels Utilized to Point Towards the Future

There are two verses that mention angels which point towards the future. The idea of a future rest or the discussion about a cosmological future is a theme promised throughout Hebrews.⁹² One of the earliest introductions to ideas about the future in Hebrews is connected with angels in Hebrews 2:5. The second angelic mention that points towards the future is a reference to humanity and angels worshiping together in Hebrews 12:22. In both of these instances, the angels are utilized to discuss the future hope which awaits the audience of Hebrews.

Hebrews 2:5 states, “Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels.” The first implication about the coming age is that it will not be subject to angels. This appears to presume the coming world is to be subject to Christ. Furthermore, this verse indicates Hebrews is interested in discussing the future of the audience, which is a precursor to later references of a coming age or the city to come.⁹³ The persecuted audience of Hebrews is being reminded their current situation may appear dire, but they can look forward to a future which is meant for them. The verse before this encourages the audience to remain faithful to the message of Christ. By remaining faithful the listeners of Hebrews can hold to the promise of the coming age. Thus, the angels are utilized to introduce a future that is promised to humanity through their faithfulness.

The second verse that refers to future events and the angels is Hebrews 12:22 which states, “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the

⁹² Verses which discuss a coming age, future rest, or a city to come include Hebrews 4:9, 6:5, and 13:14.

⁹³ Hebrews 6:5 and Hebrews 13:14.

heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering.” This verse is not in the introduction of Hebrews, but it connects with the earlier introductory verse which discussed angels and the future. Hebrews 2:5 introduces the coming age with the angels and Hebrews 12:22 expands on that concept through the utilization of angels. The mention of angels in conjunction with a new Jerusalem indicates to the audience this description is a future event. In the coming age humanity and angels will worship side-by-side, regardless of any previous hierarchical implications. The inclusion of angels implies this is a heavenly location, since mentions of heavenly places in the Hebrew Bible often had angels in attendance. The audience of Hebrews may feel alienated in their current city due to persecution, but there is a future city awaiting them.⁹⁴ Thus, the future festal gathering is a reminder to remain faithful. If the persecuted audience of Hebrews holds fast to the faith, then they could anticipate this day of promise. It is through the utilization of the angels this worship event is indicated as a future heavenly occasion.

These two instances of angelic mentions in conjunction with the future encourage the audience to remain faithful. First, they are reminded that the coming age is subject to Christ, and they will partake with him. Secondly, they can have hope for the future because they pertain to a heavenly city awaiting them. Thus, Hebrews utilized the angels to point towards a future of hope.

Conclusion

The angels in Hebrews are utilized differently than the other New Testament epistles. In Hebrews, the angels serve to introduce major theological points that uphold

⁹⁴ deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 466.

the argument of the epistle and recur multiple times. In relation to Jesus, the angels are utilized to introduce his characteristics as king, communicator, mediator, and priest. Concerning humanity, the angels are utilized to encourage humanity towards thoughts of salvation, identity, aid, and hospitality. Finally, the angels are utilized in Hebrews to point towards a coming age of hope. Thus, the utilization of angels in Hebrews is unique amongst all the New Testament epistles, for it serves to set the foundation for themes found throughout the text of Hebrews.

Chapter IV.

Conclusion

The epistle to the Hebrews is written to a persecuted audience that is admonished to remain faithful. The encouragement for persevering is discussed in relation to Jesus as mediator of a new covenant presented in Hebrews. However, this proposal for the audience to hold fast to the faith begins with the angels. The occurrences of angels in the epistle to the Hebrews are unique for they introduce major theological claims that are discussed throughout the remainder of the epistle. When Hebrews is viewed in comparison with the other New Testament epistles, the claim that angels are rhetorically utilized to introduced themes in relation to Christ, humanity, and the future is supported.

The New Testament epistles of Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Colossians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 1 Peter, 2 Peter, and Jude all refer to angels, a combined total of eighteen times. The utilization of angels in these letters is sparse, amongst half of the epistles, angels are mentioned once, and at the most four times. Furthermore, the angelic references in these epistles do not introduce major theological points for the overall epistle. In these letters, the angels are utilized to uphold or provide an example for either a central or secondary argument.

In Hebrews there is a stark contrast to the other letters, the angels are referenced thirteen times and introduce major arguments for the overall epistle. First, the angels are utilized to introduce the nature of Christ. It is through the use of the angels the audience is introduced to a royal high priest who relates to the suffering of humanity. Second, the

angels are utilized to encourage humanity, which describes the place of humanity in the cosmos; humanity is lower than the angels, but capable of being crowned with glory and inheriting salvation. Finally, the angels are utilized to point towards a future of hope. Through the utilization of angels, a future heavenly city of belonging is described to the audience. In comparison with the other New Testament epistles, angels have been utilized to introduce and uphold topics discussed repeatedly throughout Hebrews. Traditionally the angels have announced messages on behalf of God throughout history, this tradition is replicated in the epistle to the Hebrews, for the angels are rhetorically utilized to herald in the messages of Jesus' characteristics, encouragement to humanity, and a future of hope.

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