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TEACHING THE WHOLE COUNSEL OF GOD

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Chapter 1:3b-13

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- Last week, in my introduction to this letter, I said this letter will be a study in contrasts
 - And those contrasts will center around the differences between the old ways, in which God gave revelation to men, and the new and better way
 - The old ways were not wrong, just incomplete
 - Those earlier portions were designed as stepping stones, creating a path leading us to a full and better understanding
 - And Who was at the end of that path? Christ
 - So the writer’s goal in writing this letter, is to persuade Jewish believers to abandon a devotion to the old ways and lean entirely on Christ and the New Covenant
 - Now last week, I also pointed out that this letter is squarely focused on the differences between what came in the Old Covenant vs. the New Covenant
 - And that’s true
 - And there are still Christians today – Gentile Christians – who need to hear this message
 - Christians who have a romanticized interest in all things Jewish
 - The Law, the festivals, the language, the culture, the teachings, *etc.*
 - And for some, that interest becomes spiritually unhealthy, as it begins to emphasize the necessity of these old things
 - Even to the point of trying to combine the two worlds in an unintended way
 - For those Christians, this letter (along with the letter to the Galatians) stands as a witness against such thinking
 - But what about those of us who have no interest in the old, who have embraced the new, without the baggage of the old?
 - How does this letter speak to us?
 - As I also said last week, we will still find a lot we can learn from the writer’s contrasts
 - In particular, this writer punctuates his contrasts with five well-known warnings to the reader
 - Each warning follows from an example, in which the writer illustrates how failure to move forward along that path of spiritual maturity leaves us vulnerable to serious set-backs
 - So even if the issues holding us back are different than those of first century Jewish culture, the consequences are the same
- So let’s return to the letter at the end of the introductory verses and into the first contrast offered by the author

Heb. 1:3 And He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power. When He had made purification of sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,
Heb. 1:4 having become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a

more excellent name than they.

- We already examined the meaning of the first half of v.3, so we pick up in the middle of that verse
 - The writer finishes his description of the greatness of Christ by saying He is the One Who upholds everything by the Word of His power
 - Paul says something similar in Colossians

Col. 1:16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him.

Col. 1:17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

- We noted last week, that Jesus is the member of the Godhead responsible for the Creation process
- By His Word, all things were made
- And all things are held together by the power of His Word
- It's natural to hear those words, as if Christ is actively keeping the universe from falling apart, as if He is working to keep Creation intact
 - But that's not the accurate sense of these words in Greek
 - The world was created by the Word of Christ, and then He ceased the Creation process, Gen. 2 tells us
- The Lord rested from the work of Creation
 - We see the writer repeat this truth at the end of v.3
 - The idea of sitting down reflects the right of a Master to sit while His servants continue working for Him
 - So Jesus is not actively working to keep the universe from falling apart
- Instead, the writer is saying the Creation exists because of the power of God's Word to create it in the first place
 - And in that sense, the Lord holds it together by the power of His Word
 - Moreover, the Greek word for "uphold" includes the meaning of "carrying forward"
 - So the full sense of these words is that Christ brought the world into existence by the power of His Word
 - And the Lord's Word is also carrying the Creation forward to its appointed end
 - Christ's Word made the ship and Christ's Word is steering the ship into port
- And in the meantime, the Lord has assumed a position seated at the right hand of the Father
 - To sit at the right hand of a sovereign means that person is the most important person, after the sovereign himself
 - So by the position of Christ in the Throne Room of God, we know there is no

one in the Heavens more important to the Father than the Son

- This makes sense, when we remember that all Creation exists to know and serve the Lord
 - If all Creation owes its existence to Him
 - Then it stands to reason that everything in Creation exists to serve Christ in some way
- So now the writer is prepared to address his first topic of old vs. new.
 - If Jesus is the Creator of all things
 - And if He is second in importance only to the Father Himself
 - Then logically, we must conclude that nothing in the Creation can be as great as Jesus
- He is the Name above all names
 - Names are given to created things
 - When God created the animals, He appointed Adam to give them names
 - When we make something, we name it
 - Names are an indication that something had a beginning, and if something had a beginning, then it had a creator
- But God the Father and God the Spirit have never been created, having never been made incarnate
 - So they do not have names given them
 - They call themselves “I AM”
- But the second Person of the Godhead chose to enter the Creation as a man, and therefore, He was given a name: the Father gave Him the Name Jesus (Yeshua)
 - So Jesus is the Name above all other names
 - In other words, among all things in creation, He is the greatest
- And since this is true, we can know that Jesus is greater than any other created messenger or representative that God has ever sent to men, including angels
 - In v.4, the writer says that Jesus has a more excellent name than the angels
 - The word “angel” means “messenger”
 - Angels were a prominent part of Jewish religious life
 - They were second in importance only to God Himself
 - By the time Jesus came to earth, Jewish culture had practically venerated angels
 - We can see this in the Dead Sea Scrolls
 - The Essenes living at Qumran displayed a highly developed angelology in their writings
 - They possessed a book called the “Angel Scroll”
 - And another book, supposedly written by the archangel Michael
 - And to some extent, we see this angelic fascination re-emerging in some Christian circles

- It's almost a superstitious, or new age, approach
 - Some believe in so-called guardian angels
 - And false cults have been born out of appearances of "angels of light" that appeared with new messages for the faithful
- It's not hard to see how Jewish culture became so fascinated by angels, when we notice how often the Lord uses angels, both in the Old Testament and in our day
 - When they appeared to men, angels usually came in powerful and imposing ways
 - They often created great fear, which caused angels to preface their message with the standard greeting, "Do not fear"
 - I like to think that angels wear name tags that say "Hello, I'm Michael. Do not fear."
 - And they came bearing a message from God
 - As we look across all the major moments of revelation in the Old Testament, we find angels serving as the messenger of God
 - For example, let's take a little test
 - Who spoke to Hagar in the desert in Gen. 21?
 - Who spoke to Abraham with Isaac on the mountain in Gen. 22?
 - Who told Jacob and Rachel to leave Laban and return to Canaan?
 - Who appeared to Moses in the burning bush?
 - Who went ahead of the Israelites in a pillar of cloud?
 - Who protected Daniel in the lion's den?
 - Who spoke to Balaam through the mouth of a donkey?
 - Who told Gideon to rise up and defeat the Midianites?
 - In all cases, the text of Scripture mentions an angel as the messenger
 - In particular, we find one kind of "angel" at the center of these revelations: the angel of the Lord
 - This is no ordinary angel
 - In fact, the term "angel of the Lord" is an Old Testament reference to the Second Person of the Godhead
 - A pre-incarnate Christ
 - So in reality, these moments were not what they seemed
 - But the Jewish reader saw the word "angel" and came away thinking that angels were all-important to God
- So in the first century, some Jewish believers were struggling to give Christ His proper place in their worship
 - In fact, these Jews still viewed angels as a superior messenger to the Messiah
 - And if an angel is superior to Messiah, then certainly the message delivered by an angel must be superior to the message entrusted to Jesus
 - So the writer must convince his readers that the Messiah is greater than an angel

- Otherwise, he has no hope to convince them that Christ’s message is greater than the ones delivered by angels
- To do this, the writer will draw his proof from the Jews’ own Scriptures, the Old Testament
 - From vs.5-13, the writer gives evidence that the Word of God has always declared the Messiah’s superiority to angels

Heb. 1:5 For to which of the angels did He ever say,
 “YOU ARE MY SON,
 TODAY I HAVE BEGOTTEN YOU”?

And again,

“I WILL BE A FATHER TO HIM
 AND HE SHALL BE A SON TO ME”?

Heb. 1:6 And when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says,
 “AND LET ALL THE ANGELS OF GOD WORSHIP HIM.”

Heb. 1:7 And of the angels He says,
 “WHO MAKES HIS ANGELS WINDS,
 AND HIS MINISTERS A FLAME OF FIRE.”

Heb. 1:8 But of the Son He says,
 “YOUR THRONE, O GOD, IS FOREVER AND EVER,
 AND THE RIGHTEOUS SCEPTER IS THE SCEPTER OF HIS KINGDOM.

Heb. 1:9 “YOU HAVE LOVED RIGHTEOUSNESS AND HATED LAWLESSNESS;
 THEREFORE GOD, YOUR GOD, HAS ANOINTED YOU
 WITH THE OIL OF GLADNESS ABOVE YOUR COMPANIONS.”

Heb. 1:10 And,
 “YOU, LORD, IN THE BEGINNING LAID THE FOUNDATION OF THE EARTH,
 AND THE HEAVENS ARE THE WORKS OF YOUR HANDS;

Heb. 1:11 THEY WILL PERISH, BUT YOU REMAIN;
 AND THEY ALL WILL BECOME OLD LIKE A GARMENT,

Heb. 1:12 AND LIKE A MANTLE YOU WILL ROLL THEM UP;
 LIKE A GARMENT THEY WILL ALSO BE CHANGED.

BUT YOU ARE THE SAME,
 AND YOUR YEARS WILL NOT COME TO AN END.”

Heb. 1:13 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”?

- Let’s look at each piece of “evidence” the writer cites and understand how it proves his argument that Christ is greater than angels
 - The whole section is set off by an *inclusio*, which is a literary device intended to highlight a section of the text
 - You can see the beginning and end of the *inclusio* in v.5, and again in v.13
 - The same phrase, “to which of the angels did He ever say...” opens the section and closes the section

- In v.5, the writer begins his proofs with a quote from Psalms 2:7, where God speaking, calls the Messiah His Son
 - The Lord uses the word “son” to describe different actors in Creation
 - He calls believers “sons of God”
 - He calls the angels “sons of God”
 - But there is only One the Father says is His Son (singular)
 - And only this One has been begotten of the Father
- The word “only begotten” is *monogenes* in Greek, which means “the only one who comes forth from the Father”
 - No one else has come, or will come, forth from the Father to represent the Godhead in Creation
 - Only the Messiah holds that special place
 - So Psalms 2 taught that there was to be one special representative of the Father, that is, the Messiah
 - No angel can measure up to that place
- Then in v.6, the writer draws a second proof from Deut. 32:43
 - If you go to Deut. 32:43 in your English translation, you’re not going to find what you’re looking for
 - Because this writer always quotes from the Septuagint (LXX)
 - And in the LXX, Deut. 32:43 reads this way:

Deut. 32:43 Rejoice, ye heavens, with him, and let all the angels of God worship him; rejoice ye Gentiles, with his people, and let all the sons of God strengthen themselves in him; for he will avenge the blood of his sons, and he will render vengeance, and recompense justice to his enemies, and will reward them that hate him; and the Lord shall purge the land of his people.

- Speaking of the coming Messiah, Moses said that all the angels of God will worship Him
 - Surely, if angels worship the Messiah, then He must be a greater messenger than the angels themselves
- Next, in v.7, the writer quotes from Psalm 104 (which is numbered Psa.103 in the LXX) where David says that Christ created the angels

Psa. 103:1 Bless the Lord, O my soul. O Lord my God, thou art very great; thou hast clothed thyself with praise and honour:

Psa. 103:2 who dost robe thyself with light as with a garment; spreading out the heaven as a curtain.

Psa. 103:3 Who covers his chambers with waters; who makes the clouds his chariot: who walks on the wings of the wind.

Psa. 103:4 Who makes his angels spirits, and his ministers a flaming fire.

- Notice that the psalm opens with the Creation story
- The Lord, who is Christ, is making all things
- And among the things Christ made are the angels
- And the writer compares the angels to wind and fire
 - Fleeting vapors
 - Things that have a beginning and end
 - Things that serve a purpose in the Creation, but cannot compare to the Author of all things
- Then in vs.8-12, the writer highlights the contrast by emphasizing the eternal nature of the Messiah
 - First, in vs.8-9, the writer quotes from Psa. 45, where Jesus is called the God Who sits on an eternal throne
 - Obviously, angels are never called God and have no thrones
 - In fact, angels get very nervous anytime a human dares to attempt to worship them
 - The last time an angel demanded men worship him, it did not turn out well for that angel!
 - And in v.9, the Messiah is described as anointed by His Father to be above all companions, including angels
 - Then in v.10-12, the writer quotes from Psa. 102 to show that unlike angels and the rest of Creation, the Messiah existed before the beginning of Creation
 - And unlike the Creation, the Lord will never come to an end
 - The Lord is eternal and unchanging, but the Creation is wearing out like a garment and must be changed into something new one day
 - The writer is reflecting on the curse God pronounced on Creation in the Garden, after the fall in Gen. 3
- In the Garden, the Lord pronounced a curse on the physical earth and all that comes from the earth
 - Literally, everything in the earth comes from the earth
 - God called forth all plant life from earth
 - The animals were formed from the dirt of the ground, Gen 2 tells us
 - And the first man was created from the ground
 - And the first woman was created from the body of the first man
 - So literally, everything traces its origin to the earth
 - Therefore, when the earth was cursed for sin, the entire earth was directed to come to an end one day, to wear out and be replaced
 - And with it, all that comes from it
 - Including our physical bodies, which must die because of the curse on the ground
 - This is the course the writer was speaking about earlier, when he said that

God's Word upholds the world

- That Word, spoken so long ago in the Garden, is still directing the course of the universe and our earth
 - Everything is wearing out just as God proclaimed it would
 - And the manner of its destruction is prescribed as well: it will wear out
 - God said that everything came from dust (or dirt) and so to dirt it will return
 - This implies a process of disintegration, and sure enough, that's what we see happening in the world
 - In fact, this process is so predictable and universal that scientists have labeled it the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics
 - All energy in the universe moves from high ordered states to lower ordered states
 - We call it "entropy"
- We live entropy every day
 - Our world is deteriorating around us
 - Our houses and cars and clothes are all falling apart
 - Our bodies are dying a little bit everyday
 - Healthy living is just the slowest possible way to die
 - And we can see the grace of the Lord in the way He decreed a slow wearing away
 - Before men face the judgment that follows death, they're given plenty of reason to consider what comes after death
 - Every person can see that life ends sooner or later
 - And more than that, we can see the end approaching in our own life
 - We can't ignore our body's deterioration; mortality stares us in the face every time we look in the mirror
 - So we have all the more reason to get right with God before it's too late
- In contrast to that dying, corrupt Creation and all that it contains, we find a supreme, perfect, incorruptible, eternal Messiah Who is guiding this world to its appointed end
 - He has conquered sin and the death it necessitates
 - One day, He will bring all His enemies to a final end
 - And this is the writer's final proof that the Messiah is the highest, greatest Name above all names, including the angels
 - Only the Messiah can win this victory
 - In v.13, the writer ends his *inclusio*, quoting from Psalm 110, perhaps the greatest Messianic psalms pound for pound
 - Only seven verses, but it's packed with descriptions of Christ
 - Including that he will remain seated in that place of honor, at the right hand of the Father, until all God's enemies are under Christ's feet
 - In other words, Christ's ruling over Creation will continue until all the enemies of God are gone

- This is an honor and authority nothing else in the Creation can possibly equal, certainly not angels
 - We serve a Lord Who made all things, Who controls all things, Who will defeat all enemies
 - And yet He is also the One Who lowered Himself to assume a name in His Creation
 - The Name above all names
 - So that He could stand in our place, taking the curse of Creation upon His own body for the sake of our sin
 - And then He rose again to fulfill His mission in destroying the enemies of God
- This is the Messiah, the One and Only in Whom we place our trust for salvation
 - The One with Whom no angel can compare
- What do we do with this truth?
 - If we're not careful, we can be tempted to diminish Christ's power in our life, relative to some other source of power
 - Luck, chance, our own efforts, the enemy
 - How many Christians refer to Satan's power as if it is somehow in contention with Christ's?
 - The idea that some days Satan is winning, and some days Christ is winning – that is a kind of version of this thinking
 - Elevating something in the spiritual realm to an equal, if not greater, position than Christ
- The effect of this is to compromise our spiritual maturity and our walk of faith
 - It creates doubts and worries that don't need to be there
 - And those things change our behavior
 - And that's the writer's concern, which we'll study next time in Chapter 2