

3 – ANGELS IN HEBREW SCRIPTURES

Hebrews 1:5-14

The next section of this sermon/letter has two dominant features: its pre-occupation with angels and its use of the Hebrew Scriptures.

First and foremost, angels are in evidence everywhere in the Bible. There is no doubt that the people who composed the texts we call “scripture” did believe in angels. It is also true that the Jewish people shared this belief with the general populace of the ancient Middle East and drew from the rich heritage of those other cultures.

In both the Old and New Testaments, we note that there are two main conceptions about angels: they are messengers of God and they are spiritual in nature with no physical manifestation. They speak and they act as if human, but they were heavenly, i.e. spiritual, beings.

Some scholars go so far as to question whether or not the congregation to whom the letter to Hebrews was addressed were actually angel worshippers. It is worth remembering, however, that angels were prominent in both Hebrew and Greek thinking at this time. This is not unlike some of the thinking and production of artifacts and literature that motivates a similar preoccupation with angels in our own time.

It is important to recognize that in scripture angels metaphorically represent God’s activity in human affairs. God acts in providential and saving ways to help ordinary people overcome fundamental difficulties we encounter in everyday life.

My own conviction is that in faith we interpret such saving actions in different ways. Many people describe such actions on their behalf in such ways as angelic

interventions. A preferable way to interpret such events is to believe that the Holy Spirit motivates people with compassion and generosity to do what others ascribe to angels.

In the collage of angels in this introductory folder the dominant characteristic of all those shown is that they are human with attached wings. This can be interpreted as angels being anthropomorphic – in human form. We imagine them as being like us and capable of communicating God’s will to us. The human Jesus thought so too.

The importance of the references to angels in *Hebrews* is to contrast their role and mission as messengers of God to the pre-eminence of Jesus as God’s true representative and agent in God’s saving work.

The use of the Hebrew Scriptures in *Hebrews* is no longer a valid method of interpretation, although it is still often used by many preachers. On the other hand, it was a very common system in the 1st century CE. It lifts a particular text or passage out of its proper context and uses it to refer what the author intends to say.

There are seven such texts in Heb. 1:5-14. It is worth checking their original contexts. The Psalms in particular seem to have the author’s favourite source. Two in vs. 5 were taken from Ps. 2:7 and 2 Sam. 7:14. Two more in vss. 6 & 7 came from Deut. 32:43 and Ps. 104:4. Vs. 8 contains a passage from Ps. 45:6-7. Vs. 10 has a quotation from Ps. 102:25-27. Vs. 13 contains a quotation from Ps. 110:6.

Why was the author of *Hebrews* so interested in using this homiletic approach? Frances Taylor Gench puts it well when she says that the purpose was quite clear: To bring faith in Jesus and Lord to the reading of the only Scriptures then known, chiefly our Old Testament.

OPENING PRAYER

Our time is in your hands, O God, and we trust you. Speak to us through our study of your Word that we may know you as the God whose love is fully revealed in Jesus Christ. Amen.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- 1. Have you ever had any experiences of angels visiting or speaking to you, or that you would describe as angels helping you in any way?**
- 2. Angels are very common in pictures and as a wide variety of objects available for purchase. Do you or would you include any of these in your home as decorations or religious objects?**
- 3. There is no question that the biblical authors and Jesus too believed in angels. How does that affect your understanding of angels or your faith?**
- 4. Whether or not angels exist, in what ways do you believe Jesus to be superior to angels?**

CLOSING PRAYER

Go before us, O Lord, in all our ways that our doing may be begun, continued and ended in you and be to the glory of your holy name. Amen.

A Collage of Angels



