

Chapter 5 - The time for inheritance has come - Hebrews 1

At last, we have arrived at the point where we can dig into the text in detail. I trust that by now you have read Hebrews through a few times and feel reasonably familiar with it. This will help you to keep the detail in context as we study it. The first chapter of the letter is not difficult, though it does raise some questions that have left the commentators disagreeing with each other!

The author plunges straight into his argument without any introduction, eager in his very first sentence to establish the superiority and authenticity of Christ the Son of God. But more than this, Christ is the One through whom God has spoken to us “in these last days.” These are the days of His and our inheritance. We must hear and heed Him so that we may be counted amongst “those who will inherit salvation.”

The letter is about how God spoke in the past through Abraham, Moses and the prophets and how Christ has inherited, fulfilled, and superseded the provision and promises of the Old Covenant. On this basis, the author wants his readers to have great confidence in sharing in that inheritance with Christ. His purpose is to encourage confident faith in God’s promises. Confidence requires solid foundations, and so throughout the book, the author demonstrates the superiority of Christ over the Old Covenant.

I do not want to simply present you with the results of my study, but to walk with you through the process. My sincere hope is that you will do your own study and compare your results and conclusions with mine, rather than simply read my work. Over the years I have developed a pattern of study that works well for me; prayer, surprises, structure, argument, detail, review and finally application. We will follow this pattern, which I hope you will find helpful.

Prayer

I make no apologies for reminding you, throughout this book, to pray. Ask God to help you as you study His word. Ask the Holy Spirit to increase your confidence in His ability to help you and inspire you in your study. Ask Jesus to give you grace and joy as you consider Him in the pages of this letter.

Questions & Surprises

When studying a chapter I like to start by reading through and noting any surprises or questions that strike me. I try to do this as if it were the first time I had ever read the chapter. I want to notice what is being said, and not just skip over familiar words. Remember to ask the Holy Spirit to give you His eyes as you do this yourself.

These are the surprises and questions that strike me in chapter 1.

- V1 Straight in! No introduction. God speaks to us.
- V2 The last days! That was 2000 years ago.
 The world was made through Jesus.
- V3 Jesus, the man, surely did not reveal the radiance of God’s glory.
 Jesus sustains all things.
 Purification for sins, not just paying the penalty for them.
 What is the significance of sitting down?
- V4-5 Why the comparison with angels?
- V5 What is the significance of emphasising the Father/Son relationship?

V9 Why is lawlessness used rather than wickedness? (Some translate wickedness, but others follow the Greek lawlessness)

Joy is the reward for loving righteousness.

V11 The world will perish. Why does the Anglican liturgy say “World without end”?

V13 The Father is acting to make Christ supreme.

V14 Angels are sent to serve us.

How do we inherit salvation?

You will probably wonder why I am “surprised” at so much. Of course, as a well read Christian I am not surprised at any of this. I have read it too often to be surprised. But have I stopped to think about it? This is an exercise in trying to notice what is being said.

Background

The letter to the Hebrews is written against an Old Testament background from which the author draws heavily in developing his argument. His Jewish readers would have been more familiar with these passages than many of us are, so it would be wise for us to read the texts he is drawing on before we proceed with our study. Most bibles will give you cross references for the Old Testament passages quoted in Hebrews. In addition the author draws on Old Testament ideas without specifically referencing them. Where we notice this we should also try to read the passages that the ideas are drawn from. Following the cross references in a good cross-reference bible is one of the best ways of doing this.

The principal passages quoted in chapter one are Ps 2, 2 Sam 7:14, Deut 32:43 (Septuagint reading), Ps 104, Ps 45, Isa 61, Ps 102:25-27, Isa 34, Ps 110, Ps 103:20.

Structure

I won't try to answer any of my questions yet, because we need to understand more of the context. Our overview has given us a broad and medium-brush structure, but now we need a finer brush. What is the structure of this chapter?

We seem to have a series of claims about Christ in vv 1-4 and then biblical proofs of the superiority of Christ over the angels for these claims in vv 5-14. Let's see if we can match the claims to the proofs.

The claims for Christ in vv 1-4 are the following:

1. He is God's means of communication (The Prophet) – proof in the following chapters
2. He is the Son and heir – proof in v5-9
3. He is the creator and sustainer of all – proof in v10-12
4. He is the image of God's glory – proof in v6
5. He cleansed us of our sins (The Priest) – proof in the following chapters
6. He is seated in victory and exalted over all (The King) – proof in v13

Although the proofs can be matched to the claims, they read as a collection of quotations that flow from one to another which together support the claims and leave no doubt about the superiority of Christ over the angels.

We seem to have a very simple structure to the first chapter, so we can now move on to look at the argument; looking for what the writer is trying to say.

Argument

Let's remind ourselves of the overall context by referring to our overview in the previous chapter. The book is about hearing Christ and living by faith to inherit the promises. The opening paragraph of the letter boldly sets forth the pre-eminence of Christ as the supreme Prophet, Priest and King and the rest of the chapter exalts Christ over the angels. The reason for this lengthy comparison with angels is not apparent, and commentators are unsure. Perhaps the reason is that some people were claiming Jesus was nothing more than an angel, or perhaps it was the writer's way of showing how much more direct and glorious the message of Christ is than the Old Covenant law that was given to Moses through the mediation of angels¹. I favour the latter explanation, though I'm sure it does not matter. So here is my summary of the argument in this opening chapter:

Although God previously spoke to us through the Law, He is now speaking to us through His supremely exalted Son, Jesus Christ. So give your full attention to what He now says.

The Detail

We turn now to the detail. Because this is not a commentary, I am not going to attempt a detailed analysis of every word and phrase, but rather to follow the argument in both my mind and my heart. Remember, we want to find the tree of life and enjoy its fruits.²

There is much you can learn simply by looking up all the cross references (if you are fortunate enough to have a cross reference bible), but what I propose is that we go through the chapter section by section looking at the key elements of the writer's argument, without getting bogged down along the way. Whilst looking at the detail, we must keep our structure in front of us, so that we keep track of the context and the flow of the argument.

Heb 1:1-2

⁽¹⁾ In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways,⁽²⁾ but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.

The opening sentence sets the tone for the whole letter. The author jumps straight in, connecting immediately with his readers (... *our* forefathers) and making his opening claims for the superiority of Christ: He is God's Son and heir, the creator and supreme prophet. We have been propelled into a new age; the *last days*. This is clearly fundamental to the author's claims, later in the letter, that we should leave behind the Old Testament revelation and follow the new revelation brought to us by the Son. It is significant that the writer goes straight from the reference to Jesus as God's Son to the statement that He is also the heir. This truth is substantiated and built upon throughout the letter.

Heb 1:3-4

⁽³⁾ The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. ⁽⁴⁾ So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

Continuing his exaltation of Christ as the radiance of God's glory and the sustainer of all creation, the author gets straight to the heart of the issue he will address later in full; Christ, our great Priest-

¹ See Acts 7:30,38,53 and Gal 3:19, Heb 2:2. The Jews, believing that man cannot see God and live, thought that Moses received the Law through the mediation of an angel rather than directly from God. "God makes His angels winds, his servants flames of fire" Heb 1:7, quoting Ps 104:4.

² See Chapter 2 of this book.

King, has dealt once and for all with the sin that separates us from God. Again we see the reference to the Son as heir, this time in relation to His name.³

Heb 1:5

⁽⁵⁾ For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son; today I have become your Father”? Or again, “I will be his Father, and he will be my Son”?

The writer now proves these opening claims from scripture, in each case contrasting the Son with the angels (the reason for which we have already briefly discussed above). All this fits with his intention to prove that his *Nazarene*⁴ readers should leave the old Covenant behind and embrace Christ and His gospel.

He starts by pointing out that as God’s Son, Jesus is superior to the angels. There are no scriptures recording God addressing angels as sons.⁵ Anyone whom God addresses as a son is superior to the angels. The first quotation is from Psalm 2:7 and refers to King David. The second quotation is from 2 Sam 7:14 where God tells David that He will be a father to Solomon. We might well ask on what authority the writer takes these statements, directed at ancient kings, and claims they apply to Jesus?

The Christocentric interpretation of Scripture

It is easy for us to forget that the first generation believers did not have the New Testament. When they wanted to learn about the Messiah, in whom they had put their trust, they had to find Him in the Old Testament. Jesus opened the eyes of His disciples, showing them how all the Scriptures concerned him.⁶ Following the ascension, the Holy Spirit continued this role, as Paul describes in 2 Corinthians 3. In fact, the apostles had established such powerful and widely accepted *Christocentric*⁷ interpretations of scriptures, that early in the second century AD the Jewish authorities, attempting to foil these interpretations, commissioned a new translation of the Hebrew Scriptures to replace the Septuagint⁸ translation that was in common use.⁹ The writer to the Hebrews uses the established Christocentric approach in interpreting the Old Testament quotations, which are taken from the Septuagint.

In both quotes given in this verse, the context includes a future promise. Psalm 2 was always seen as looking beyond David to the coming Messiah and is easily applied to Jesus. The application of 2 Sam 7 is subtler. God was calling Solomon His son, but v16 says, “Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.” Jesus is the one, in the line of David and Solomon, whose throne is established forever. This is why the writer can apply the quote to Jesus.

³ “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,” (Phil 2:9)

⁴ See Chapter 4. A Nazarene was a Jewish believer in Jesus as the Messiah.

⁵ Gen 6:2 might be quoted, but we are not told these “sons” were angels, and “sons” is probably used in a much looser way here.

⁶ On the road to Emmaus –see Luke 24:27.

⁷ Interpretation based on the assumption that all scripture is ultimately pointing to the coming Messiah.

⁸ The Septuagint was a highly regarded Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, made by 72 Jewish scholars between 3rd and 1st century BC.

⁹ The result was a failure. It was an unreadable word-for-word literal translation, rather like “Youngs literal translation”. See Bruce, *The Spreading Flame* p266.

Heb 1:6-9

⁽⁶⁾ And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him.”¹⁰

⁽⁷⁾ In speaking of the angels he says, “He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire.” ⁽⁸⁾ But about the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the sceptre of your kingdom. ⁽⁹⁾ You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.”

The writer continues his proof of Christ’s superiority by contrasting His relationship to the Father with that of the angels. They are called to worship the Son and serve Him, whether as winds or fire¹¹ or whatever He wishes. In contrast, the Son has come into His inheritance, fulfilling the prophecies – including this one from Psalm 45 – of a Messiah who would reign eternally as King. For God to command worship of anyone but himself is unthinkable, thus the exhortation for the angels to worship the Son is proof of the Son’s equality with God.

Heb 1:10-12

⁽¹⁰⁾ He also says, “In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. ⁽¹¹⁾ They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. ⁽¹²⁾ You will roll them up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end.”

The writer now offers proof of his claim that the Son is the creator and sustainer of all things, quoting from Ps 102. Why he applies this to Christ is unclear, but the author (both divine and human) considered it so. The point being made is the immutability (unchangeable-ness) of Christ in contrast to the angels and the Mosaic Law they brought to Israel.

Heb 1:13-14

⁽¹³⁾ To which of the angels did God ever say, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”? ⁽¹⁴⁾ Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?”

Finally, the writer offers proof of the kingship of Christ, quoting from Ps 110, which Christ applied to himself in Matt 22:41ff. He concludes that angels are incomparable to Christ. They are ministers, sent by God to serve the purposes of God’s supreme Son who has come that we might inherit salvation.

Review

This chapter, then, sets the scene with the heir of creation, having accomplished salvation, speaking to God’s people so that they might share in His eternal inheritance. Having established that the Son is a superior spokesman compared with the prophets and the angels, through whom the Law was given, the argument leads directly and naturally to the conclusion in Hebrews 2:1 that “We must pay more careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away.” And that is what we will try to do now.

I now want to look at the surprises we noted earlier. We have made sense of the text, but have we paid careful attention to it? Have we let it touch us, shape us, enlighten our hearts? As we dwell on these things, let us ask the Holy Spirit to speak life to us. Faith comes by hearing, as Paul says, and when I recognise the Holy Spirit speaking to me I find His word comes with the faith to obey. That

¹⁰ This quote is found in Deut 32:43 in the Septuagint and the Dead Sea Scrolls, but not in our translations of the Hebrew.

¹¹ The Jews believed that Moses’ burning bush was an angel disguised as fire and Elijah’s encounter with earthquakes and wind (1Ki 19:11) was also an encounter with angels performing the part at God’s command.

is how it should be. Paul describes in Romans 7 how the law tells us what to do but doesn't lift a finger to help us obey. In contrast, when the Holy Spirit speaks to us it comes with life-giving power.

The Last Days

What does it mean, that we are in the *last days*? What is the significance?

The question for the Jews

First of all, imagining ourselves to be Jews in the synagogue hearing this letter read, this statement that these are the "last days" would be loaded with very significant meaning. It would not fail to arouse serious controversy in a congregation of mixed Nazarenes and non-Nazarene Jews. It would be the equivalent today of someone saying, "... now that Jesus has returned". It is church-splitting stuff! This is a very good example of a statement that we can so easily read, because of our familiarity, without even thinking about it. When this was originally read it would have caused eruptions. It illustrates the need to read with thoughtful care, constantly asking for the help of the Holy Spirit as we prayerfully read and re-read even the most familiar scripture.

The Jews had been expecting the Messiah for centuries and knew that when he came, he would usher in a new age of the Spirit with a new covenant. They expected this to be accompanied with world peace and the reign of this Messiah over all the nations who would bow the knee to Yahweh and bring their worship and riches to Jerusalem. This is what the Law and the Prophets promised. This is what the Last Days meant to them. So how could the writer, along with the other apostles, claim that these were the Last Days? This is what the writer is going to do, using the scriptures to prove both that Jesus is the Messiah and these are the Last Days.

The resurrection of the dead and the gift of the Spirit were the two primary events that, in the Old Testament, mark the end of the ages.¹² Through the resurrection of Christ and the subsequent gift of the Spirit, God has moved history into the *last days*, which will continue until Christ's return. We are living in the *last days*, a new age with a New Covenant. The promises of world peace and worship of God will be fulfilled at Christ's second coming.

The Question for us

But for us reading this same claim, another question springs from our lips. "How can he describe what is now 2000 years of history as the *last days*? Surely he was mistaken." John is even more explicit: "Dear children, this is the *last hour*; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour." (1 John 2:18)

Is Expectation biblical?

All through the ages since Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden, there has been an expectation of soon entering into the promised inheritance. God said to Abraham that he would give him a land and make of him a great nation. Do you imagine that when he left Ur of the Chaldeans he expected to live all his life in a tent? When God said he was giving Joshua a land flowing with milk and honey and that God would defeat all his enemies, did Joshua expect to spend his whole life fighting the Canaanites? When the Holy Spirit filled Solomon's temple did he expect that it would be destroyed before God would fulfil his promise to bring the Gentiles into the faith? When Ezekiel saw the vision of the restored nation and the restored temple which was to follow 70 years of exile and when he saw the river of life and the tree of life and the glory of God filling the temple did he expect more than 2000 years to pass before his vision was fulfilled? When Malachi said "The Lord will suddenly come to His temple" did he think he was being given a prophecy that would not

¹² Jer 31:33, Ezek 36:26-27, Joel 2:28-29

actually be fulfilled for centuries? What prophet would even begin to imagine that his words would be preserved and studied for thousands of years before they were completely fulfilled?

The bible seems to present each generation of faithful believers with a promise of inheritance. Surely it is no accident that the New Testament writers also had this expectation. They were continuing in a long line of God's people looking forward to their inheritance which, since the prophets, was for God to establish a new heaven and a new earth following the Day of Judgement. Jesus brought this expectation right to the forefront with his parables and teaching concerning the coming Day of Judgement.

Is Expectation mistaken?

The letter to the Hebrews does a terrific job of showing us how all of creation's history, all the biblical characters, the law and the prophets are part of the single story of God's incredible eternal plan to bring, as the writer says, "many sons to glory" (2:10). Yet, one may ask, were not all these saints deluded and mistaken? Were they not simply living with false hopes? Surely, delayed fulfilment only results in discouragement and unbelief.

Again, the letter to the Hebrews deals directly with this issue. It warns us against the sort of unbelief that characterised the Israelites throughout their history. The saints of old may have died without seeing the fulfilment of what they hoped for, but rather than teach us to be more restrained in our faith, the writer urges us to imitate their faith and perseverance and to follow their example.

"So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved." (Heb 10:35-39)

Is our expectation remote?

So, what are we to make of it when we are told, "*He who is coming will come and will not delay*"? Should we, with the benefit of hindsight, view the promises of Jesus' return with a big pinch of salt and say, "Well, I suppose it will happen one day, but He didn't return when the New Testament writers expected, so the chances of it happening in my life time are extremely remote"?

To this suggestion Jesus answers through many of His parables with a resounding "NO!" The Old Testament saints were meant to live in constant expectation, the apostles were meant to live in constant expectation, and we too are meant to live in constant expectation of Jesus' imminent return. If that presents our western minds with a challenge then so be it. But let us take seriously the exhortation to live in the light of His coming.

"Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming." (2 Pet 3:11-12)

"But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure." (1 John 3:3)

How should the expectation affect us?

There are countless ways in which this should shape our lives but, as an example, consider just one: I can view my task of parenting as preparing my children for life, or as preparing them for eternity. I can pour my energies into helping them get the best exam results, or I can disciple them in eternal values and their relationship with God. I can teach them to play football and chess but will I also teach them how to study the scriptures and how to pray? These are not nice ideals for truly spiritual people but truly sensible suggestions for daily investment in a certain eternity.

I know that I am called by God to be part of His glorious bride. I know that one day, sooner or later, Jesus will come back in power to reveal His glory and be joined to his bride. I know that if I die before Christ returns, then I shall rise to meet the Lord before those who are still alive. I know that, whether soon or still long delayed, Jesus is coming back for me and that how I live now determines how I shall live then.

My prayer is, “Lord! So that I may bring Jesus all the more glory at His return, please help me to live now in the light of that glorious day.”

Jesus, the radiance of God’s glory

My next surprise was “The Son is the radiance of God’s glory.”

Although John writes, “We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (**John 1:14**), we can hardly imagine that in looking at the man Jesus, people saw the full radiance of God’s glory! They would have been burnt to a cinder¹³ and no one would have doubted for a second that Jesus was God Almighty. The glory they saw was revealed to them in their spirit by the Father¹⁴. So, what is the writer of Hebrews referring to? He is referring to the glory of the eternal Christ whom Paul also describes in Colossians 1 and John sees in Revelation 1.

It is wonderful to read that Jesus is the *radiance* of God’s glory. Every quality of which God is the embodiment, Christ is its radiance. Just as the sunshine is the radiance of the sun, and we could not know the sun without that radiance, so Jesus is the radiance of God. It is through Him that we see the glory of God. This leads to a question: “How do I think of Christ?” As the remarkable man, Jesus, who washed His disciples feet, or as the indescribably glorious risen victorious Christ, anointed with joy, seated in victory and interceding for me at the throne of God? The Jesus we enjoy fellowship with is not the man of flesh, but the God of Glory, who, in order to show us His love and bring us into friendship with Him, humbled Himself and came as a man. He is now highly exalted. It is the glorious risen Christ who is the subject of the gospel of salvation.

“... Christ Jesus ... made himself nothing, ... he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (**Php 2:5-11**)

“... this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ,” (**Eph 3:8**)

“The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” (**2Co 4:4**)

I wonder if our image of Christ is stuck at the man at the wedding or the well or on the cross, or whether we have followed the apostles in seeing Him as the exalted Christ, filled with unsearchable riches as he radiates the glory of God. Let us pray that the Holy Spirit will reveal the risen glory of Christ to us as we pray and worship and meditate on Him.

Jesus, seated.

My next surprise is to see Jesus “sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.”

When we consider all the trouble in the world, and our frantic prayers for His intervention in everything from world wars to parking spaces, it may be hard for us to imagine Jesus seated. Surely he must be utterly frazzled with the stress of managing this anarchic world, disentangling squabbling Christians and answering one person’s request for sunshine while his neighbour prays

¹³ Rev 20:11 “Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.”

¹⁴ Matt 16:16-17 Peter’s confession.

for rain! Yet the scriptures consistently show us that God is at rest. He is surrounded by peace and joy.¹⁵ This might be conceivable if He looked the other way and simply contemplated His own glory, yet the scriptures show God as unfailingly attentive and watchful over His creation.¹⁶ The wonderful truth is that God's sovereign purposes are so sure, His grace so effective and His calling¹⁷ so certain that He can sit in restful peace. He knows that the victory over darkness is won and that a pure, beautiful and fitting Bride will be formed out of the church. She will awe the angels and stop every rebellious tongue.¹⁸

Do our prayers reflect the posture of our gloriously victorious seated Christ, or our own frantic, fearful, anxious minds? Paul's prayers provide an instructive model for us. He is confident in God's power to fulfil His purposes and views himself as a minor player, cooperating, observing and thanking God for His sovereign acts of grace. Look for instance at **1 Cor 1:4-9, Phil 1:3-6, Col 1:3-6, 1 Thess 1:2-4** and **1 Tim 1:3-6**. Each prayer consists of thanksgiving, remembrance of God's work in their lives, and confidence in their election. If we are walking in partnership with Christ (that is, truly wanting His perfect will in our lives and responding obediently to His direction) then we too can be at rest in Christ, confident that He will complete the good work He has started. Our prayers can also be full of thanksgiving, remembrance and confidence - a recipe for a joyful life.

I love to dwell on the truth, expressed in this chapter, that Jesus sustains all things by His word, so that He will receive in full the inheritance promised to Him by His Father.¹⁹ This inheritance is a bride fit for Him, made up of the church gathered across the ages from every tribe and nation. This gives us great encouragement and hope as we face the many challenges of living as "salt and light"²⁰ in a world that so often rejects the gospel message.

The Father/Son relationship

My next surprise concerns the statement "You are my Son".

Why is the relationship important?

There is a particular significance that scripture accords to sons, and that is inheritance. Under Jewish law, the first-born son inherited a double-share and the other sons equal shares of their father's property. This principle is frequently applied to Christ, and to us as his brothers. "Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ" (**Ro 8:17**) and, "So you are no longer a slave, but a son; and since you are a son, God has made you also an heir" (**Gal 4:7**). It is this aspect of Sonship that the author is emphasising in this chapter, leading into his further discussions about inheritance.

In verse 5 he quotes Psalm 2, which says, "Today I have become your Father". Why does he not say "I have been your Father since time began"? Paul, preaching at Antioch tells us, "What God promised our fathers he has fulfilled for us, their children, *by raising up Jesus*. As it is written in the second Psalm: 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father'" (**Ac 13:33**). So we see that Jesus became an heir at the resurrection. That was when Jesus dealt with the barrier of sin and made it possible for Him to have an inheritance in the saints.

¹⁵ Jn 14:27, 15:11

¹⁶ Jer 32:19 "Your eyes are open to all the ways of men;"

¹⁷ I use "calling" in the biblical way, meaning our calling to saving faith, not a calling to be a missionary or a doctor.

¹⁸ Eph 4:13, 5:27

¹⁹ "I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession." (Ps 2:8)

²⁰ These analogies, used by Jesus, mean living and speaking in godly ways that bring goodness and truth to others.

I have another question regarding Jesus as God's Son. Why should the New Testament, starting with Jesus and continuing with the apostles, make such a point about Jesus being God's Son? Why not present Him simply as the Word - without specifying the subservient relationship, as is the case with the Holy Spirit. Then the trinity would consist of God, the Word (who became flesh) and the Holy Spirit. This might have avoided a great deal of argument in the early centuries about whether the Son is co-eternal with the Father or was created by Him. But Scripture seems insistent that we appreciate the relationships that exist within the trinity, and especially that between the Father and the Son. When we are commanded to love one another, God intends us to look to the trinity for our model.²¹ When we are commanded to submit to one another God intends us to look to the trinity for our model.²² The trinity models for us relationships of love, respect, submission, honouring, trust and initiative among persons of equal significance and status but differing roles; united in heart and purpose and devoted to promoting one another's joyous goals. What an example for our marriages, our families and our churches! Let us submit to one another out of reverence for Christ (Eph 5:21).

How do we inherit salvation?

This brings us to my final surprise. The last verse of the chapter says, "Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?"

My question is, what does the writer mean by *inherit* salvation? This is a recurring theme in Hebrews that we will explore in some detail during the course of our study. But at this stage let us introduce ourselves to the concept by briefly examining the different uses of the word *salvation*. The New Testament writers use the word to describe the following:

1. Saving from physical danger – e.g. **John 12:27, Heb 5:7**
2. All encompassing spiritual salvation – e.g. **Luke 19:10, Rom 1:16, Heb 2:10**
3. Initial salvation – **Rom 8:24, 10:10, Eph 2:8, Heb 6:9**
4. Ongoing salvation – **1 Cor 1:18, Rom 5:9-10, Phil 2:12, 2 Thess 2:13, Heb 2:3, Heb 5:9**
5. Future salvation on judgement day – **Mk 13:13, Rom 13:11, 1 Cor 3:15, Heb 7:25, 9:28**

So, what does the phrase "inherit salvation" refer to? Here are some examples outside Hebrews that describe this:

"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life." (**Mt 19:29**)

"Now I commit you to God and to the word of his grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." (**Ac 20:32**)

"Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory." (**Ro 8:17**)

"... we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently." (**Ro 8:23-25**)

"The Holy Spirit is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory." (**Eph 1:14**)

"... you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward." (**Col 3:24**)

²¹ Jn 15:9,12 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.... Love each other as I have loved you." And Jn 17:26 "... that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

²² Jn 14:10 "The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works." (NKJV) See also Matt 8:9 The centurion.

These quotes, and especially this last quote from Colossians (along with many other references to reward for faith and godliness) make it clear that there is an eternal inheritance which we will receive following the judgement day which is a reward for how faithfully we live our lives. This, at least in part, is what it means for a believer to inherit salvation. The letter to the Hebrews says a great deal about this, as we shall see.

A final note on inheritance as a reward

I want to conclude this chapter with a note about the biblical principle of reward as a motive for obedience. Many find this idea difficult to accept, thinking that the promise of a reward cheapens our obedience to Christ.

C.S. Lewis in “The Weight of Glory” says,²³

“The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire.”

“If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are too easily pleased.”

“We must not be troubled by unbelievers when they say that this promise of reward makes the Christian life a mercenary affair. There are different kinds of reward. There is the reward which has no *natural connexion* with the things you do to earn it, and is quite foreign to the desires that ought to accompany those things. Money is not the natural reward of love; that is why we call a man mercenary if he marries a woman for the sake of her money. But marriage is the proper reward for a real lover, and he is not mercenary for desiring it. A general who fights well in order to get a peerage is mercenary; a general who fights for victory is not, victory being the proper reward of battle as marriage is the proper reward of love. The proper rewards are not simply tacked on to the activity for which they are given, but are the activity itself in consummation.”

The rewards promised for trusting God and obeying Him are not bribes, they are the fulfilment of God’s promises. They are the inheritance that God has created us for. They are the delights of God and His kingdom. When the Psalmist writes, “Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!” (Ps 34:8) the Holy Spirit is urging us to trust God so that we might enjoy His goodness. The reward for trusting God is God Himself in all His manifold goodness. This is how we should view the promises of reward and inheritance. To earnestly desire the rewards that God has promised is honouring to God. It shows that we value the things that He values for us; all that is good and wholesome that we might delight in Him forever.

Questions for discussion and application in Hebrews 1

V1-2 How does God speak to you today? Look at Jn 1:1-14 and 1 Jn 1:1-5

How do you recognise His voice? See Jn 10.

²³ This sermon can be downloaded from <http://www.doxaweb.com/assets/doxa.pdf>

- V2 Why do you think scripture reminds us that God / Jesus created the world? Consider the following examples: **Isa 40:26, Isa 42:5, Isa 45:12,18, Eph 3:9, Col 1:16, Heb 11:3, Rev 4:11, Rev 10:6**
- V3 What is your image of Jesus when you pray? Is it the man, the glorified King, or some other image? How does your image of Jesus affect the way you relate to God? Look at Paul's prayers in his letters, use them as a model for prayer for a few weeks, and see how it strengthens your faith.
- V5 In what ways can the relationships within the trinity inspire your human relationships?
- V8-9 What do you feel about "loving righteousness and hating wickedness"?
- V14 What do you feel about the fact that God has created angels to minister to you?
- 2v1 Have you given careful attention to the things you read in Hebrews 1? What have you learnt? What will you do about it?
- Is there a verse you could memorise from this chapter that would encourage you?