

The Singer of Israel

- ^{1:7} Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire." ...
- ¹⁴ Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?"
- ^{2:1} "Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.
- ² For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution,
- ³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard,
- ⁴ while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.
- ⁵ For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.
- ⁶ It has been testified somewhere, "What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him?"
- ⁷ You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor,
- ⁸ putting everything in subjection under his feet." Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him.
- ⁹ But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

- ¹⁰ For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering.
- ¹¹ For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers,
- ¹² saying, "I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise."
- ¹³ And again, "I will put my trust in him." And again, "Behold, I and the children God has given me."

Hebrews 1:7, 14-2:13

Angels in the Architecture

PAUL SIMON WAS A RATHER WASHED UP folk singer. Having separated from his singing partner Art Garfunkel over a decade earlier, recently divorced from his then wife **Carrie Fisher** (of Star Wars fame), and stinging from his most recent solo album which was a commercial failure, Simon was in full mid-life crisis mode. So what did he do? As someone puts it, “**He did what any other famous, borderline washed-out musician would do – he went to South Africa.**”¹

¹ “You Can all Me Al: Meaning,” Shmoop, <http://www.shmoop.com/you-can-call-me-al/meaning.html>.

From here, Simon would reinvent himself. He was stricken with the haunting melodies of the choral group **Ladysmith Black Mambazo**. Collaborating together, they would make several songs that would contribute to what would eventually become the album of the year in 1987: *Graceland*. The most popular track off the album was “You Can Call Me Al,” a song that seems basically meaningless, until you realize that it is an autobiography of Simon’s midlife crisis. It is a story of a beer-bellied “soft in the middle” man who needs “a shot at redemption,” which he finds in the everyday scenes of “cattle in the marketplace” and “scatterlings and orphanages.”

The same author writes, “**The jubilation he experiences while surrounded by the new sights, sounds, people, languages, and customs leads Simon to conclude that he sees ‘angels in the architecture [spinning in infinity],’ prompting him to declare ‘Amen! Hallelujah!’**”² That’s their story, but I can’t help but wonder. The Ladysmith are a Christian group, and they had a deep influence upon Simon in those years. Angels in the architecture is a clear reference to the way **Christians engraved heavenly beings** into the very fabric of their church buildings for a thousand years. For

² Ibid.

Simon, these angels may have been purely secular, but for the Christians, it is always tied to the church and to heaven and to True Worship of the Creator God.

As I think about Hebrews 2, I liken it to what my girls do to their hair. I find **three basic strands** that turn into a single beautiful braid. The strands are **Christ and the angels, Christ as a man, and the death of Christ**. When woven together, they form a magnificent **braid of worship**. Now, there is too much here to focus on all of it in a single sermon, so we will **save the death of Christ** until next time. Today, I want to help us think about the rest, as it is a natural way to develop where we left off.

Last time, we focused on the many OT citations that find their way into the architecture of **Hebrews 1-2**. Of those, the vast majority come from the **Psalms (2, 8, 22, 34, 45, 91, 97, 102, 104, 110)**. Of these, the vast majority have one thing or another to do with **angels**. Psalms and angels, why? Let's consider angels first, see how this leads to a discussion of man, and then lastly we will return to the Psalms.

Christ and Angels

In doing this, we need to remember how the preacher got us to Hebrews 2. The basic argument of Hebrews will be that **Christ is “better”** than various things in the Scriptures (our Old Testaments). The first thing he wants to tell us that Christ is better than is the angels. Various explanations have been given for why he would start here. The most common may be that his audience had somehow fallen into angel worship and he was trying to correct that. But it is not at all clear that there was angel worship going on with these people. Perhaps something else then?

I think early Fathers like **Justin** understood exactly what our author may be getting at, “**The Word of God ... is also called ‘angel’**” (*First Apology* 63). And **Irenaeus** similarly calls him, “**Ruler among kings; the Prophet among prophets; the Angel among angels; the Man among men; Son in the Father; God in God; King to all eternity.**”³ They are referring to the Angel of the LORD in the Old Testament. This is the Person who covenanted with Abraham and Israel, who was worshiped by Moses and Joshua, who bears the Name Yahweh, and who forgives sins. Jude refers to him as “Jesus,” saying that “**Jesus saved a people out of the land of**

³ Irenaeus, *On the Lord's Resurrection* cited in Darrell D. Hannah, Michael and Christ: Michael Traditions and Angel Christology in Early Christianity (Tübingen: Mohr Sebeck, 1999), 208. This is a debatable passage of Irenaeus. It may also come from Melito of Sardis.

Egypt” (Jude 5), which is exactly what the Angel himself said to the people of Israel, “I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers” (Jdg 2:1).

Hebrews begins by talking about Jesus as the Son and comparing him then to angels. Why? He wants to make it crystal clear that this person who appeared many times as an angel is greater than them. Angels are called “sons of God,” but only this Angel is the “begotten” Son (Heb 1:2, 5; Ps 2:7). The sons of God watched and sang at the creation (Job 38:7), but the Son was himself the Creator of all things (Heb 1:2; cf. Gen 1:1), including the angels. Angels minister before the throne of God in heaven (Heb 1:7; Ps 104:4), but the Son sits on the throne of heaven (Heb 1:8; cf. 45:6-7; Isa 6:1ff; John 12:41). And so on. His argument actually helps clarify in our minds that the Angel is not like other angels, because he is the Son of God.

The first chapter concludes by asking, “Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation” (Heb 1:14)? This refers to the heavenly host, the created angels. For the most part, commentators do a nice job explaining the meaning. For example, R. Kent Hughes says, “Angels minister to believers

... For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone” (Ps 91:11, 12). Angels have dramatically delivered believers from prison (Acts 5:19; 12:6–11). Angels rejoice at the conversion of sinners (Luke 15:10). They are present within the Church (1 Cor 11:10). They watch the lives of believers with interest (1 Cor 4:9; 1 Tim 5:21). They carry believers away at death to the place of blessedness (Luke 16:22).”⁴ Indeed, and very true.

And yet listen to the confusion that he and many others introduce in trying to pin down one of the origins of this idea. He, like so many others throughout the centuries, cites Ps 34:7 at this point, thinking that maybe Hebrews has this in its mind. “The Angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.” Yes, as an angel, the Angel of the LORD is doing something for those who are to inherit salvation, in a sense ministering to them. Yet, this is no ordinary angel. People are to “fear” him. He “delivers” them—the language of the Exodus.

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews: An Anchor for the Soul*, vol. 1, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 35.

Let me explain what I mean via an old Irish parchment called the *Liber Hymnorum*. It tells the story of Patrick who sang a song when an ambush was laid against him in order that he might not sow the seeds of the Gospel on the Emerald Isle. It has come down through the ages and it is still known to us today. It is called *St. Patrick's Breastplate* or *The Deer's Cry* and it goes:

Christ be with me

Christ before me

Christ behind me

Christ in me

Christ beneath me

Christ above me

Christ on my right

Christ on my left

Christ where I lie

Christ where I sit

Christ where I arise

Christ in the heart of every man who thinks of me

Christ in the mouth of every man who speaks of me

Christ in every eye that sees me

Christ in every ear that hears me

Salvation is of the Lord

It is a wonderful little prayer. Where might he get these ideas? The *Wikipedia* suggests that its origin might be Ephesians 6 where the Christian puts on the armor of God to protect him from the snares of the devils. It comes in his poem just after a section that says:

I bind myself to-day to the virtue of ranks of Cherubim
In obedience of Angels
In service of Archangels
In hope of resurrection for reward
In prayers of Patriarchs
In predictions of Prophets
In preachings of Apostles
In faiths of Confessors
In innocence of holy Virgins
In deeds of righteous men⁵

Might I suggest another fount of origin (undoubtedly there are many) for the prayer. **Psalm 34:7**, “The Angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.” Patrick’s prayer is a song of worship, and it reflects

⁵ See Thomas Olden, *Epistles and Hymn of Saint Patrick* (Dublin: Hodges, Foster, and CO., 1876), 105-09.

the OT theology of the Angel. The early church knew full well who the Angel of the Lord was. Why wouldn't they derive part of their theology of Christ from Him?

Angels and the Law

In Hebrews, this idea of angels being ministering spirits is then used to introduce a particular act of ministration that they were involved in: **The giving of the law**. **Skipping the warning in vs. 1 for a moment**, “For since the message (logos) declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution..” (**Heb 2:2**). Why would he mention the message or word being put into effect by angels and where does that even come from?

First of all, this is a very common idea in the NT. Hebrews talks about it (here). Stephen talks about it, “**You who received the law (nomos) as delivered by angels and did not keep it**” (**Acts 7:53**). Paul talks about it, “**Why then the law? ... it was put in place through angels by an intermediary**” (**Gal 3:19**). The origin seems to come from **Deuteronomy 33:2**, “**The LORD came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount**

Paran; he came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at his right hand” (Deut 33:2; cf. Ps 66:17).⁶ The idea is found all over the ancient world. Hammurabi makes it very clear at the outset of his law code that he was called by name by the gods Anu and Bel “to bring about the rule of righteousness in the land.” Law has its origins not down here, but up there in the heavenly realm. God used angels (OT: gods, NT: angels) to deliver his word to the peoples of the world. The Angel of the LORD is the chief Law-giver to Moses (He is Paul’s intermediary between angels and the LORD).

At any rate, the point being made is that the message given to Israel through angels was reliable. They taught Israel laws about the way that invisible things around them work, things like justice, goodness, righteousness, and holiness; things that modern man thinks are purely man-made cultural relativistic conventions as simple to overthrow as a loser on *Survivor*, just a tiny democratic or a judicial activist vote away. But no amount of pretending that these things don’t exist in invisible places will make them go away. Law is transcendent. It comes from heaven

⁶ we have learned from God the most excellent of our doctrines, and the most holy part of our law, by angels or ambassadors; for this name brings God to the knowledge of mankind, and is sufficient to reconcile enemies one to another. Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.136

itself. Israel learned firsthand that every transgression or disobedience must receive a just retribution. It was proven time and again in violent and deadly ways to their people. But angels also taught Israel the good news of what is necessary to be saved when you break those laws. Perhaps this is why Hebrews' word is broader than the law. It was all part of the "message" they were sent to give.⁷

You may think, so what is the point? Why would he bring up the idea of angels giving the law, and who cares? It has to do with what I believe is the climactic reason that Jesus is better than angels, and **he derives his warning** from this. **It is this simple, but staggering news that Jesus became a man.**⁸ This may be the most world-shattering news ever proclaimed. We will see why as we continue.

This starts off rather generically. As I read, keep in the back of your mind that Luke may be the preacher. **"How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit**

⁷ At the end of the old economy, the angel announces this good news, **"Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy that shall be for all peoples. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord"** (Luke 2:10).

⁸ See the note above.

distributed according to his will...” (Heb 2:3-4). (Did you hear the obvious similarities to Pentecost)? Something has happened, he is saying. This picks up now from Heb 1:1: in these last days God has spoken to us by his Son. But who is this “Son?” He is everything already discussed ... but more.

This Son has come among us. This Son has given a message about salvation. He is the Lord who declared it and whose disciples gave it directly to our preacher, who is a most likely a second generation Christian, even as Luke was who had to investigate carefully everything that he wrote in his two-volume Luke-Acts (see Luke 1:1ff; Acts 1:1ff). This Lord has proven its power at Pentecost in signs and wonders, demonstrating that he desires this message to continue to the ends of the earth.

Now, the point here is not to deny that Jesus had some relationship to the giving of the message in the OT. In fact, he gave that message. Rather, it is to contrast what kind of a person has brought this NT message. In the OT, he gave it as an angel. This differs greatly from these last days. For the giver of the NT Gospel message was no angel. Rather, he was a man. Not an angel-man (angels are often called “men” or “*ish*”). But a human-man (*adam*, which angels are never

called). Not a demi-god (cf. [Acts 14:12-13](#)), but a fully human person.

This explains why suddenly, the preacher seems to change the subject, when in reality, he is simply getting to this climactic point that he has been patiently driving us to since he began the sermon. “For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking” ([Heb 2:5](#)). He continues thinking about angels, but now adds “the world to come?” When did he speak about that? When talking about “salvation” ([1:14](#); [2:3](#)).⁹ Oh, what a glorious subject. Did you miss that he spoke about it twice already? When Christians talk about salvation, they are not primarily talking about salvation from some temporary vices like alcohol or salvation from wars or bad governments or abusive husbands. Salvation refers to eternal life beyond death; eternal life in the world to come.

This phrase “world to come” is actually fascinating in the Greek. The verse literally reads, “Not for to angels did he subject the coming inhabited world” (“not” is placed first for emphasis). He chooses a word for “world” here that is

⁹ It is also found in the quotation of Ps 102:27–28 at 1:11–12, where the Psalm is speaking about the world to come.

not *kosmos* or *aion* (age), but *oikoumene*. The root word is a “house,” a house that is populated. Some of the references in the NT are “solemn and liturgical” (keep that in mind for later).¹⁰ He is speaking about the future inhabited earth where the rule of God reigns in perfect harmony with the divine will through his *human* sons. As such, this world to come is God’s eternal temple. It is inhabited by Christians who rule in justice. The Apostolic Father Clement speaks about it this way (listen to how this is tied to “law”):

For you through your works have revealed the everlasting structure of the world (*oikoumene*). You, Lord, created the earth. You are faithful throughout all generations, righteous in your judgments, marvelous in strength and majesty, wise in creating and prudent in establishing what exists, good in all that is observed and faithful to those who trust in you, merciful and compassionate: forgive us our sins and our injustices, our transgressions and our shortcomings.

(1 Clement 60:1)

¹⁰ Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 158.

This will be the way of it in eternity. But the point is, angels are not those who administer things in this new world. Men do. This is a great change from the present way of things.

This leads to the vital citation of yet another Psalm: Psalm 8. “It has been testified somewhere, ‘What is man, that you are mindful of him, or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet’” (Heb 1:6-8a). Like the previous Psalms, this one also has in its original meaning, something to do with Jesus Christ.

It is a Psalm of David, who as Dr. Clowney puts it, “Wrote, not as a private individual, but as the Lord’s Anointed [Messiah], called to suffer as God’s servant.”¹¹ It begins by praising Yahweh who is also called “our lord [Adonai]” (Ps 8:1). As we have seen in previous Psalms, this is a title that is often used to distinguish Yahweh the Son from Yahweh the Father. This Yahweh’s Glory is above the heavens and can be seen by all through natural revelation (nature).

This God then gains glory on earth. However, he does it in an unusual way—through the mouths of babies and

¹¹ Edmund Clowney, “The Singing Savior,” *Moody Monthly* (July-August, 1979): 40–42.

infants, in the frail and feeble people of the earth. He gains fame by defeating his enemies (2). This strange juxtaposition of the feeble and the powerful cause David to wonder. “When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man (*‘adam*) that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (3-4). Man and the son of man? Is this just a way of saying the same thing?

Well, this is the part that Hebrews now quotes. It takes this “son of man,” not as referring to any man, but as referring to a specific man: **Jesus Christ**. Here is how he does it. First, he quotes from the LXX rather than the Hebrew, “You made him (man) a little while lower than the angels” (Heb 2:7; Ps 2:5). The Hebrew says, “You man him a little lower than the elohim [the gods or heavenly beings or sons of God].”¹² Yet, in making him lower, God has “crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet” (Heb 2:8; Ps 2:6). A side-note here, this is

¹² **Going Deeper:** In this way, we can see that “angel” came to be used for “gods” or “sons of God” by the second century B.C. On another note, we know that *elohim* is not referring to making man lower than God himself (NAS, YLT, ASV, GEN, etc.) for a couple of reasons. First, Hebrews uses the LXX’s “angels” (plural), not God. It is unthinkable that Hebrews didn’t understand that it really meant God made man a little lower than himself! Second, the context says “for a little while” man is made lower. The implication is that one day he will be above them. Man will never be above God, but the whole argument of Hebrews is that, through Christ, man will be above angels (“do you not know that we will judge angels?”).

one of the places that Jews and early Christians went to in their non-biblical writings to give a motive for the temptation in the Garden. The basic idea is that Satan understood exactly what is being said here. God gave man (“what is *man*?”) dominion over the earth, but Satan thought he deserved dominion. After all, he wasn’t made from mud like that Adam! Furthermore, *everything* was to be put into subjection to man, and this included even Satan himself. In the Psalms, the angels are commanded to worship the Son (Heb 1:6; Ps 97:7, etc.). In Genesis, Adam is the one who is supposed to cast out the devil. The idea was thus taken backwards, that Satan was also commanded to worship Adam. Thus, in the *Life of Adam and Eve* for example, Satan refuses to bow before Adam, and is so enraged by the idea that he tempts our parents to sin. At any rate, this is the best motive I have ever heard for the temptation, and it seems solidly rooted in Scripture.

Continuing on, **David** seems to be looking **backwards to the First Adam** when God gave him dominion over the earth. **Hebrews**, however, seems to be looking **forward to the Second Adam**, who reclaims that dominion. Its focus is on the Christological title “son of man.” It is to the son of man that everything is put into subjection. “**Now in putting**

everything in subjection to him (singular), he left nothing outside his control” (Heb 2:8). So the exposition from Hebrews is that all along, the Messiah was in view in Psalm 8. Therefore, in Psalm 8 it is predicted in a shadowy way that God’s Messiah would be a human being.

This is so important because it gets at the heart of what is new about these last days, about the NT, about even the message it delivers. “We see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor” (Heb 2:9). To believe in Jesus is to believe that in the NT, God made him lower than the angels. In other words, he became a man. Never before and never since in all of history has God become man. He didn’t seem like a man. He didn’t merely look like a man. He wasn’t partially a man. He wasn’t an angel-man. He was a human being.

But to believe in Jesus is also to believe that he has been crowned with glory and honor. Many don’t believe this, because they don’t see it with their eyes. But, it has just said, “At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection him” (Heb 2:8). Why? Because now is still the time of salvation. Once all things are put under his feet, there will be no more time left for salvation. Every knee will bow on that day

simply because the King will return triumphantly. People will be forced to submit when today they refuse.

Too many people, however, do not see the glory and honor because they are looking for all the wrong things. They are looking for **power** like James and John who wanted to call fire down on their enemies. They are looking for the **beatific vision** like Philip who wanted to see the Father. They are impatient. They want the eschaton now. They want glorious power now. What they do not want is crosses. It is like that woman “pastor” at the Reimagining Conference years ago in Minneapolis who said, “**I don’t think we need folks hanging on crosses, and blood dipping, and weird stuff.**”

You may think that is not what you need, but the reality is, that is exactly what you need. It is all that you need. It is sufficient. For you see, in order for man to be exalted above the angels, a man had to fulfill what Adam failed to fulfill. This is why Jesus is the Second Adam. Jesus had to become man, else man would be doomed to hell. Not some of us. All of us. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

Jesus’ coming as a man has as its ultimate human act his death on the cross. As I said, we will look at this in more detail next time. But we can say today that the glory and

honor that Jesus is crowned with is “because of the suffering of death” (Heb 2:9). Glory comes through suffering. He had to suffer death so that “he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering” (10).

What a radical, crazy plan. A stumbling stone to Jews. God doesn't become man. Foolishness to Greeks. Demigods may be men, but they don't die on crosses. Yet, it is the enduring message of two thousand years, and many have come under its power and sway as they have understood that salvation comes only through Jesus Christ, because only in Jesus Christ is God fully present to be propitiated, and man fully present to make atonement for sin. Salvation is the hope set before us by Jesus himself. He told us how we might be saved, and he said that it is through him that this would happen. It all was put into motion when the Son of God became a son of man. Jesus as a man saves men (and women and children).

This is the reason why Hebrews has the first of many warnings here in this section. Beloved, you must pay much closer attention to what you have heard, lest you drift away from it (Heb 2:1). The worries of this life choke out the seeds of the Gospel. The complacency of giving in to its pleasures

and giving up meeting together (as it will say later) cause us to drift away. And yet, if the message delivered in the OT by angels had swift and just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It is all the more sure, because God as man now gives us the news.

The gospel is good news. It is the news of how sinners can be reconciled and forgiven by and to a holy God. There is no other message on earth that compares. Nor is there a message that is capable of transforming individuals, families, cities, nations, and the whole earth (one day) if God be so pleased. It is the power of God to salvation, because it is the living, kind, gentle words of salvation in Christ. His yoke is easy and his burden is light. He offers you rest if you will but believe in him.

But friend, one day this good news will no longer be offered. In the same way, if you turn your back on it, there is no good news left for you. All there is waiting is that punishment and retribution for transgressing and disobeying the law of God. If you will not stand with Christ, you will stand by yourself. And woe to him who must stand before the Tribunal of heaven without an Advocate, even Jesus the Just and the Justifier of those who have faith in him.

The Divine Liturgy

With this, let us consider this strange question of why Psalms? Why does he keep quoting the Psalms? This is the braid that comes from our three strands. It is the **braid of worship**. Hebrews, in telling you about Christ, in warning you about belief, in showing you his deity and humanity, is leading you to the very heart of worship. And beautifully, he is doing it by quoting songs. There have been hints of this all along.

The language of **Heb 1:7** and **14** is that the angels are *leitourgika pneumata* (“ministering spirits”) and the *leitourgous puros phloga* (“ministers of flaming fire).” Do you hear the word there from which we get “**liturgy**?” Ministers serve in God’s temple, even as the holy ones of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 5 and other places. In heaven, they lead in the worship of God. The church was trying to depict something of this theology for the people in the very buildings when they put those **angels in the Architecture**.

Has not the church known this forever? The so-called Divine Liturgies of Chrysostom and Basil which are still used in the Eastern churches are infused with angels from beginning to end. Gregory, Augustine, and Chrysostom all

spoke of angels coming to assist in the worship of God's people.¹³ Do we not ourselves call the angels to praise God during the Doxology ("Praise him above ye heavenly host")? Hebrews itself has already done this in a citation of a Psalm (**Heb 1:6**). Angels are among us and assist in the liturgy of God in heaven. However that works I'm not sure, but I don't have to understand it for it to be true.

Remember, angels gave the law. But the law was at the center of Israel's worship. More angels in the architecture. The world to come is the home of God. It is his temple. More worship. Even the way the author has composed his message is worshipful, both as a theological masterpiece, but now as a citation of songs and even the wordsmith of a poet. As one commentator says, "The structure of the comment is artful,"¹⁴ and is "replete with alliteration and assonance."¹⁵

¹³ The references here speak about the Mass (Augustine) or the Holy Sacrifice (Gregory) or the Divine Victim (Chrysostom), and I leave those references to a footnote so as not to confuse the point. I'm not saying that the theology of the Mass (which actually developed or rather devolved over the centuries) is good or right. I'm saying that the idea of angels interacting with human worship of the Divine Christ is something that has always been understood and is in fact quite biblical.

¹⁴ Harold W. Attridge and Helmut Koester, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews*, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 72–73. He specifically refers to the two phrases drawn from the psalm that teach surround "namely Jesus" (vs. 9)

¹⁵ Ibid., 64. He refers to the alliteration in vs. 4: *aggelon laletheis logos* and *pasa parabasis kai parakon*; and the assonance in *terasin ... dunamesin ... thelesin*.

But ultimately, this is summarized for us in one more Psalms quotation and two quotations that come from a poetic section in Isaiah. “I [Isaiah] will put my trust in him” (Isa 8:17), “behold, I and the children [God’s people] God has given me” (Isa 8:18), because “I [Christ] will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise” (Ps 22:22).

This citation from the Psalm comes itself in the middle of one of the greatest Messianic songs in the Psalter: Psalm 22. Edmund Clowney has a wonderful, short little article on this. He writes:

When Christ comes, a song comes, for Jesus Christ is a singing Savior ... [This] Psalm begins with the cry, ‘My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ Jesus made that cry His own on the cross. But the Hebrews passage reminds us that the whole Psalm is Christ’s—not only the cry of abandonment at the beginning, but also the vow of victory at the climax (vs. 22) ... Jesus had sung that Psalm often before He went to the cross. Indeed, He knew and sang all the Psalms in the congregation of God’s people. Think of the meaning the Psalms had when He sang them! If you would open a new experience of worship, meditate on the Psalms as the Psalms of Jesus. You have noticed that

there are ‘we’ Psalms, written in the first person plural: ‘We are thy people and the sheep of thy pasture’ (Ps 100:3). Jesus sings those Psalms with us. He is the singing Shepherd; we are the lost sheep He has brought home rejoicing. He sings over us (Zeph 3:17), and with us, and for us. Jesus can sing the ‘we’ Psalms with us because He sings the “I” Psalms for us as our Savior. “Lo, I am come, in the roll of the book it is written of me. I delight to do thy will, O my God” (Ps 40:7-8) ... Christ would explain His suffering and glory from the Psalms because He experienced the agony and the exstasy the Psalms predicted. His cry, ‘Why hast thou forsaken me?’ came from the pit of His anguish. Angandoned by His friends, ringed about by His enemies—seen in the Psalm as wild bulls, roaring lions, baying hounds—Jesus knew the ultimate horror, the hell of forsakenness by His Father .. What songs of agony Christ sings—the psalms of His suffering that sealed salvation! ... Our lord became our brother to die in our place. He teaches us honest songs, heart-cries to God: ‘My days are consumed like smoke, and my bones are burned as an hearth’ (Ps 102:3). Yet Christ’s psalms of suffering rise in faith to God. In abandonment He cries “Why?” but His question leaps from the depths to the heights. “My God!” He cries, even

in His forsakenness. “Though art holy” (Ps 22:3) ... ‘Save me from the lion’s mouth” (21). Indeed, even before God answers, the anguish of His Anointed turns to a vow of praise: “in th emidst of the congregation will I praise thee” (22).¹⁶

Beloved, we may be surrounded by a host of angels even at this moment. They may be assisting us somehow in worship. We know that they are even in worship now of the Living God as we are. But Jesus! Jesus is the singer of Israel, and he sings for us as our brother! Indeed, later in Hebrews, he will become the ultimate *liturgos* or minister in the temple of heaven (**Heb 8:2**). For he has become a man. What angel is there that can say this? Christ is greater than the angels, because Christ has become a man, taken on our infirmities, humbled himself, emptied himself. He has died for us and is honored in his resurrection from the dead. Now, he is glorified and sits at the right hand of the father always living to make intercession for us.

In John’s Gospel, John says that Isaiah saw the glory of Christ and spoke about him. Hebrews is now quoting Isaiah 8. In it, Isaiah acts as representative of Israel, crying out in

¹⁶ Clowney, *Ibid.*

faith in the LORD for himself and the people he represented, which he calls children. Hebrews sees Isaiah speaking in the person of someone else. This is Jesus. The idea is that Christ as representative leads us to faith in God. Who is “us?” His “brothers,” the “children” of the Father. The ESV translates the word “congregation.” This is the word *ekklesia*: Church.

He does this as he sings. He does this as we worship. It is why worship is such an important means of grace, for during it we come no closer to God on earth. May the Singer of Israel lead you to trust in him today. Praise him in the church, for he is greater than angels and he leads us in triumphant procession in the glorious temple-gates of heaven.