

October 2

Lesson 5

# THE RADIANCE OF GOD'S GLORY

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DEVOTIONAL READING:: John 1:1-5, 10-14

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 1

## HEBREWS 1:1-9

<sup>1</sup> In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. <sup>3</sup> w 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. <sup>4</sup> So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.



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<sup>5</sup> 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”?

<sup>6</sup> And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says,

“Let all God's angels worship him.”

<sup>7</sup> In speaking of the angels he says,

“He makes his angels spirits,  
and his servants flames of fire.”

<sup>8</sup> But about the Son he says,

“Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;  
a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.

<sup>9</sup> 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.”**

## KEY VERSE

***The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.—Hebrews 1:3***

## LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify key terms that set forth Jesus’ identity and status.
2. Explain Jesus’ position as the climax of God’s saving plan.
3. Describe one way he or she can exhibit greater submission to Jesus as supreme king and make a plan to do so.

## LESSON OUTLINE

### Introduction

- A. Who Is the Greatest?
- B. Lesson Background

### I. Revealer of Truth ([Hebrews 1:1, 2](#))

- A. That Was Then ([v. 1](#))
- B. This Is Now ([v. 2](#))

### II. Revealer of Glory ([Hebrews 1:3, 4](#))

- A. Person and Work ([v. 3](#))  
*Jesus Is Nice; God Is Mean?*
- B. Status and Name ([v. 4](#))

### III. Worthy of Worship ([Hebrews 1:5-9](#))

- A. Status of Angels ([vv. 5-7](#))  
*The Great and Powerful*
- B. Status of the Son ([vv. 8, 9](#))

### Conclusion

- A. The Crucified King
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. Who Is the Greatest?

A good way to start a lively discussion is to ask people who is the all-time greatest in a particular field. The greatest athlete, the greatest artist, the greatest political leader, the greatest singer, the greatest writer—everyone who has an interest in the activity will have an opinion. And most of those interested will have opinions that differ.

Our text for today begins to make a case for the greatest. It states that Jesus is the climax of all that God has done in history, that he is the greatest in God’s plan because he is the divine Son of God. Those who wonder who is greatest in God’s plan have their answer; and on this question, no one can afford to be indifferent. Everything in life is at stake in this most important matter.

### B. Lesson Background

The letter to the Hebrews is a book with an origin shrouded in mystery but with a message of enormous influence. Hebrews does not name its author, unlike other New Testament letters. In the early centuries of the church, some believed that it was written by Paul. But although it does show a connection with Paul’s circle (his associate Timothy is mentioned in [Hebrews 13:23](#)), the treatise is written in a style very different

from that normally seen in Paul's letters.

In fact, the style of Hebrews is different from all other books of the New Testament. We can say with some confidence that the letter was written by someone who was influenced by Paul or his associates, but who wrote no other book that survives to the present. Some have suggested Apollos, Barnabas, or Priscilla as possible authors, but these remain mere speculation.

Even so, we can infer much about the circumstances that this letter addresses. Hebrews emphasizes Christ's supremacy, his fulfillment of the Old Testament, and the utter necessity of continuing in faith in him. Thus it seems likely that Hebrews was written to Jews who had put faith in Jesus when they heard the gospel, but who then faced intense social pressure to renounce that faith and return to the practice of Judaism.

Conversations between these Christians and their Jewish families and friends are easy to imagine. Perhaps the unbelievers had said that while Jesus may have been an important person, perhaps even an angel, he simply did not fit the prophecies about God's promised king. Returning to the old ways would mean continuing to be part of God's "chosen people" while no longer experiencing the ostracism that faith in Jesus prompted.

Hebrews offers a sharp correction to that line of thinking. Yes, God had been at work in Israel to fulfill his promises. But those promises were indeed fulfilled—in a deep, thorough, and unexpected way—by Jesus. Because God's divine Son, Jesus, is the greatest in God's plan, then to reject Jesus is to reject God and his plan. But to hold to Jesus is to experience the fullness of God's promises and the inauguration of God's eternal blessings.

## I. Revealer of Truth

(HEBREWS 1:1, 2)

### A. That Was Then (v. 1)

**<sup>1</sup> In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways,**

Many people view the long-ago events of the Bible as having little connection with them personally today. But for the original recipients of this letter, the distant past of biblical history is their own past. God had communicated with the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who came before *the prophets*. That communication continued through centuries that spanned the conquest of the promised land and the eras of the judges and the kings, during the exile, and into the restoration after exile.

Over those periods God made promises, protected the helpless, orchestrated victories, appointed leaders, gave laws, and issued warnings. How God was at work and what it meant was declared by his prophets. They were empowered by his Spirit to speak authoritatively for him.

## HOW TO SAY IT

aeons (or eons) *ee-unz*.

Apollos *Uh-pahl-us*.

Barnabas *Bar-nuh-bus*.

patriarchs *pay-tree-arks*.

Priscilla *Prih-sil-uh*.

The words of the prophets and the inspired history of God's dealings that they provided was Israel's heritage. In these the people of Israel could truly say that they had heard God's voice and understood his will. The book of Hebrews affirms that God had indeed been at work through Israel's prophets. But now a page of that history turns to one who brings about the intended fulfillment.

#### *What Do You Think?*

What stories of God's work in Old Testament times are especially meaningful to you? Why?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Stories of deliverance
- Stories of judgment
- Stories of transformation
- Stories of promise
- Other

### B. This Is Now (v. 2)

**<sup>2a</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son,**

The past holds the story of God’s work, but recent days hold something more. The phrase *in these last days* indicates the recent past, but it also implies that in such days God has been bringing his plan to its climax. What the past has promised, these last days have seen fulfilled. God had indeed spoken through many prophets, but in these last days he has spoken through one who is greater than a prophet.

As the book unfolds, Hebrews will paint a detailed portrait of what it means to be God’s *Son*. Here at the beginning, the book’s Jewish-Christian readers understand the term against its Old Testament background. God’s “son” in Israel’s Scriptures is sometimes Israel itself ([Hosea 11:1](#), quoted in [Matthew 2:15](#) to apply to Jesus). But more often the “son” was God’s appointed king ([1 Chronicles 22:6-10](#)). The idea of a promised king is a keystone in the foundation on which Hebrews builds its case for the superiority of Jesus.

### *What Do You Think?*

How does knowing Jesus provide you with a sense of nearness to God and his work? How should that affect the way you think and live?

### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Providing assurance
- Providing challenge
- Providing example
- Provoking gratitude
- Reorienting priorities

### **<sup>2b</sup> whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.**

The appearance of this kingly Son is indeed the high point of all that God has done. As God’s king of fulfillment, he is God’s *heir*, figuratively inheriting all of creation as God appoints him ruler. The king whom God promised through the prophets is described as the one to exercise God’s righteous rule over all things ([Isaiah 9:6, 7](#)). This Son of the last days fulfills that promise.

But this Son is not king simply by God’s recent appointment. The Son assumes the throne by right of his very nature. In affirming that God *made the universe* through the Son, the writer uses an expression that suggests all of time and space (literally *aeons* or *eons*). All creation, including humanity, is subject to the rule of this Son because he is the Creator of all (compare [John 1:3](#); [Colossians 1:16](#)).

Already we hear an unmistakable, emphatic declaration. The writer and the readers agree that the world was created by the one true God. Now the writer says that God created the world through his Son. This can mean only that God’s Son is indeed divine, by nature God. He is by appointment and by nature God’s greatest spokesman because he is God. To submit to him is to submit to God; to reject him is to reject God.

## **II. Revealer of Glory**

([HEBREWS 1:3, 4](#))

### **A. Person and Work (v. 3)**

#### **<sup>3a</sup> The Son is the radiance of God’s glory**

Because of his divine identity, the Son, who came in the flesh ([John 1:14](#)), has revealed God as he has never before been revealed. It is the Son who brings the prophets’ revelations to the high point of completeness and fulfillment. *God’s glory* is the full expression and revelation of his being. Everything that God is, his glory expresses. The divine Son was able to bring *the radiance* of his glory because the divine Son is that radiance. God’s glory was revealed to a certain extent in Israel’s history ([Exodus 16:6, 10](#); [24:15-17](#); [33:18-23](#); etc.). In Jesus it has been revealed as fully as it can be until he returns ([1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17](#); [Titus 2:13](#); [Revelation 1:7](#)).

#### **<sup>3b</sup> and the exact representation of his being,**

This phrase makes a point similar to the above. The word *representation*, like radiance, does not refer to a revelation of God’s physical appearance, of course, since God has no physical body. Rather, it means the making clear of God’s true nature or essence (compare [2 Corinthians 4:4](#) and [Colossians 1:15](#), where a different Greek word is translated “image”). In the Son, God’s nature is fully revealed. He shows us fully who God is ([John 14:9](#)).

### ***JESUS IS NICE; GOD IS MEAN?***

“Oh, I just love Jesus. Jesus is nice. But God—now he’s mean.” My acquaintance must have read the confusion on my face because she elaborated as she continued: “Oh, you know—he’s always destroying nations and sending plagues and all of that stuff.”

So that was it. To her, God the Father—the God of the Old Testament description—is the punishing deity. Jesus, on the other hand, is the God of mercy—the one who forgives and heals.

Those who think that the God of the Old Testament is all about wrath have apparently never read the book of Jonah! The book of Hebrews is also a lens through which to see the true nature of God—the one God of both the Old and New Testaments. If we want to have the best, clearest picture of God that has ever been given, we need to look at Jesus (compare [John 14:9](#)).

People of the first century encountered God in Jesus. When they did, he blew up their preconceived notions. They watched him shock the experts, melt hard hearts, restore hope, and touch those considered “the least” of humanity. What a clear, beautiful picture of God! What held true in the first century still holds true today: if you want to understand God, look to Jesus.—V. E.

**3<sup>c</sup>. sustaining all things by his powerful word.**

The Son—the radiating, revealing image-bearer—is central to all that exists. *His powerful word* carries the created world to its God-appointed destiny. In all ways Jesus is God’s king who fulfills his purpose.

**3<sup>d</sup>. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.**

But simply ruling is not the entirety of God’s purpose. The sovereign God seeks to forgive rebellious humans. So the Son who is king is also the Son who is high priest ([Hebrews 4:14-5:10, lesson 7](#)). His work, what Hebrews reveals as his offering of his own life as a sacrifice, is to cleanse the rebels of their guilt. He reconciles as well as rules.

Having accomplished his work of reconciliation, Christ assumed the position of authority on the throne of divine power. So the alternatives for humanity are clear: (1) acknowledge the Son as king and receive the cleansing that his death offers or (2) reject his offer and his authority, thereby persisting as his enemies and being subject to his punishment.

## B. Status and Name (v. 4)

**4 So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.**

*Angels* are of great interest to Jews of the first century. Such spirit-beings, who appear occasionally in the Old Testament as God’s messengers, had become the subject of much well-intended speculation. But the Son of God is fundamentally greater than any angel. For one thing, he has an inheritance, bearing the authority of God himself. The Son’s *name*—how he is to be known to all—is superior to that of any angel because he has acted to bring God’s plan to its intended fulfillment (compare [Philippians 2:8, 9](#)).

The text does not tell us how the original readers viewed Jesus in relation to angels. But the author slams the door on any attempt to equate them.

*What Do You Think?*

What mistaken beliefs about angels have you heard? How do we correct these?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Concerning angelic power
- Concerning angelic authority
- Concerning angelic communication
- Other

## III. Worthy of Worship

([HEBREWS 1:5-9](#))

### A. Status of Angels (vv. 5-7)

**5<sup>a</sup>. For to which of the angels did God ever say,**

**“You are my Son;  
today I have become your Father”?**

At this point, the letter begins a series of quotations from the Old Testament. As the writer quotes these texts, he expects the readers to remember the contexts from which the quotes are taken and to think of how those contexts put the kingly Son’s role in perspective. It is a role greater than that of any angel or other created being.

The first text quoted is [Psalm 2:7](#) (also in [Acts 13:33](#); [Hebrews 5:5](#)). This psalm asserts that God’s king will bring righteous peace to a world overwhelmed with arrogant human rebellion. With [verse 7](#), God pronounces that his Son will rule with all the power and authority of God himself.

**5<sup>b</sup>. Or again,**

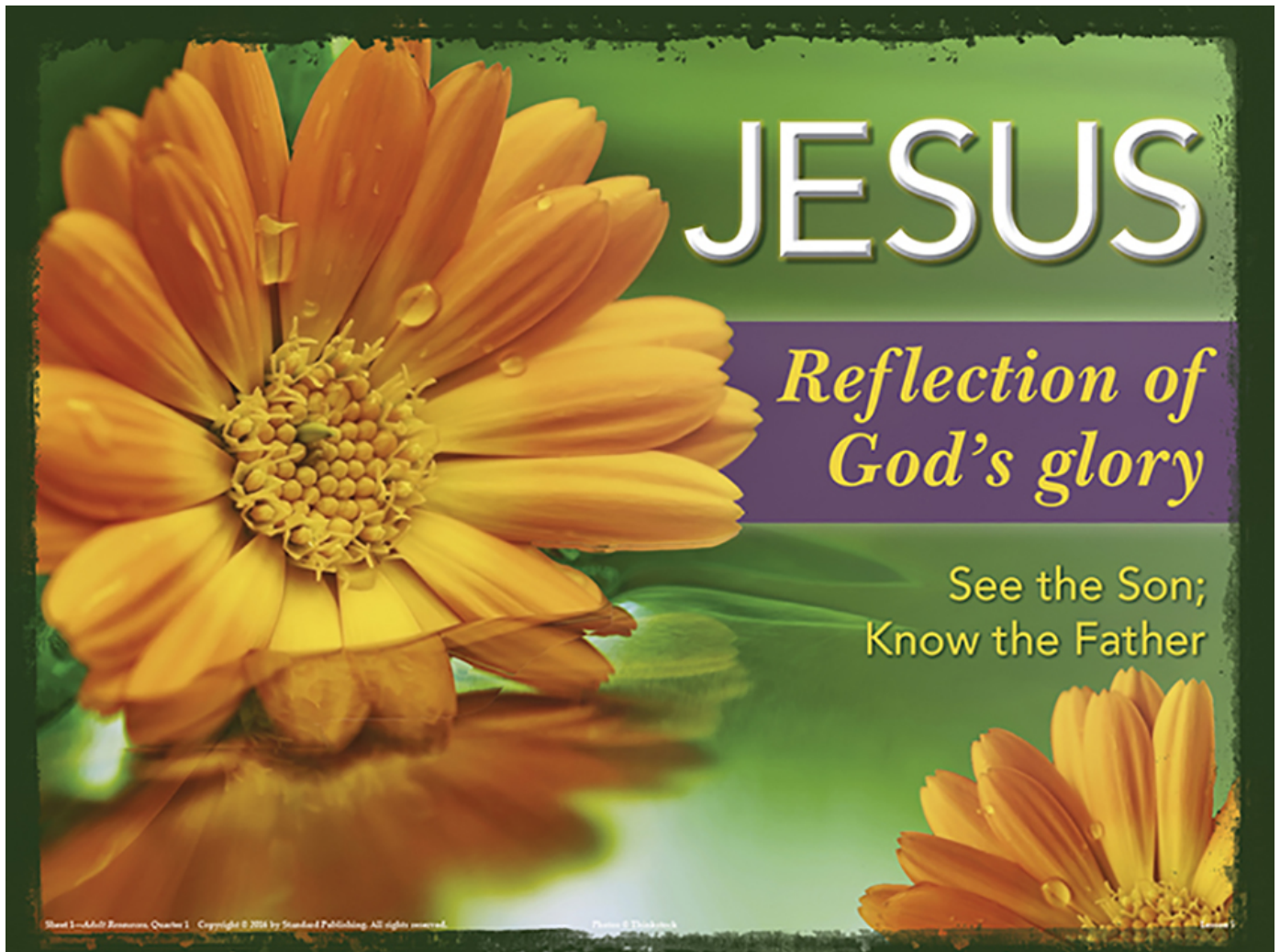
**“I will be his Father,  
and he will be my Son”?**

Now the writer draws on [2 Samuel 7:14](#) (retold in [1 Chronicles 17:13](#)), which is part of God’s promise to David that the Son—the king to build God’s true temple and whose throne God would establish forever—would be of David’s “offspring.” Hebrews goes on to state that as God’s Son,

Jesus' death constituted the true sacrifice; and as high priest, he carried his own blood to the true tabernacle (the temple's precursor) of Heaven ([Hebrews 9:11, 12](#)). Neither is ever said of angels.

**6. And again, when God brings his firstborn into the world, he says,**

**“Let all God’s angels worship him.”**



**Visual for Lesson 5.** Start a discussion by turning this statement into a question: “In what ways does Jesus reflect God’s glory?”

The last six words translate a phrase from the old Greek version of [Deuteronomy 32:43](#). This phrase does not appear in English translations of the Old Testament that are not based on that Greek version. [Psalm 97:7](#) is similar.

The writer of Hebrews applies the action of this phrase to the Son as God’s *firstborn*. This term in context means not “first one created” but “authoritative one” (compare [Colossians 1:15, 18](#)). So, argues the writer, God’s designated authoritative one, who himself is fully divine, holds the authority of God and deserves worship as God. The implication is clear: if this Son receives worship from angels, surely he must receive worship from us as well.

**7. In speaking of the angels he says,**

**“He makes his angels spirits,  
and his servants flames of fire.”**

This is a quotation of [Psalm 104:4](#), but if you turn there you will discover that it reads differently. One issue is that the ancient Hebrew word for *wind* is also the word for *spirit*. Also, both the Hebrew and Greek words for *angels* can refer either to heavenly or earthly messengers (examples: [Genesis 32:3](#); [Exodus 3:2](#); [Luke 7:27](#); [22:43](#)). The inspired author of the book of Hebrews, who quotes from the old Greek version of [Psalm 104:4](#), therefore has to make choices. Modern translators of English versions also must choose! But no matter how great God’s servants

are—be they angelic or otherwise—there is one who is greater.

### ***THE GREAT AND POWERFUL***

A memorable scene in the classic film *The Wizard of Oz* takes place in the basilica-like hall where the great and powerful wizard holds audience. Billowing smoke and terrifying sounds accompany his thunderous voice and larger-than-life visage. Who could stand in that hall without being in awe of the wizard’s manifest powers?

Angelic appearances result in similar reactions in the pages of Scripture. Angels sometimes must help humans overcome terror before completing the task of delivering God’s message to them (examples: [Daniel 10](#); [Luke 1:11-17](#); [2:8-12](#)). We may be tempted to smirk at ancient believers for being overly impressed by these celestial beings when we remember that humans are the ones created in God’s image ([Genesis 1:27](#)) and that we will judge angels ([1 Corinthians 6:3](#)). But we must not overlook the need to humble ourselves before the Creator of all: Jesus the Christ.

Which impresses you more as you read the Bible: angelic appearances that inspire awe and fright or the lowly appearance of the baby Jesus in a manger? Although he could have come to earth in radiance and power far outshining that of angels, he chose not to. Jesus did not come to terrify us into submission by means of his mighty power. He came, rather, to die for us. How will you model this humility before others this week?—V. E.

## **B. Status of the Son (vv. 8, 9)**

### **8. But about the Son he says,**

**“Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;  
a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.**

To contrast the Son with angels, the writer quotes from [Psalm 45:6, 7](#) in this verse and the next. This psalm appears to have been written as a celebration of the wedding of Israel’s king. As the psalm invites those gathered to admire and congratulate the king as he appears for the ceremony, it reminds the audience that Israel’s king rules under the authority of God. It is God’s *throne* that endures *for ever and ever*. His authority, symbolized by *a scepter*, enforces his right way, not the personal interests of a selfish king.

#### *What Do You Think?*

What difference should it make that the heavenly king died for you rather than being an earthly king who would not do so?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

- Difference in trust
- Difference in priorities
- Difference in relationships
- Difference in values
- Other

### **9a. “You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness;**

To love *righteousness* and hate *wickedness* are two sides of the same coin. The king’s commitment in this regard must be absolute. The ideal king who rules under the true God will never reverse that love/hate outlook, no matter what the situation. And Jesus never has, does, or will.

### **9b. “therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy.”**

Kings in ancient Israel were recognized as such by being anointed with oil (examples: [2 Samuel 2:4](#); [5:3](#)). Since Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit instead of oil ([Acts 10:38](#)), the expression *the oil of joy* is used figuratively to signify the fulfillment of God’s promise to bless his people with a worthy king (compare [Isaiah 61:3](#), [lesson 4](#)).

The quoted psalm describes the ideal king, and that ideal is fulfilled in Jesus. Even the best of Israel’s ancient kings failed in various ways at times. But Jesus is the king whose throne God establishes forever ([2 Samuel 7:13](#)). Jesus, the only one without sin ([Hebrews 4:15](#), [lesson 7](#)) in Israel’s line of kings, is the only one who can bring about God’s righteous rule. He stands apart as the unique, singular king of God’s kingdom.

## **Conclusion**

### **A. The Crucified King**

The letter’s opening connects Jesus with the great history of God’s dealings with his people. Jesus does not break with that history but brings it to God’s intended climax. Today’s passage begins an extended explanation of Jesus’ fulfillment of every aspect of God’s promises. Yet

remarkably, Jesus is not mentioned by name in today’s text; he will not be mentioned by name until [Hebrews 2:9](#). But our author knows that the first-century readers are quite familiar with the story of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection. He wants to make sure that they understand its implications.

The familiarity of this story should give us pause. The one whom Hebrews proclaims as the greatest figure in God’s plan is the divine Son who experienced all the tests to which humans are subject. He is the one who died a tortuous, humiliating death on a Roman cross. The king who is exalted above even angels is the crucified one, raised again to triumphant life as he bears the marks of his death ([John 20:27](#); [Revelation 5:6](#)).

The subjects of this king suffer rejection and persecution as he did. They are pressured to give up the path of submission to God as was Jesus when challenged to come down from the cross ([Matthew 27:40-42](#)). But the stakes are too high ever to give in to such pressure. The Son stands above angels and earthly kings in authority, exalted to the very throne of God. To belong to Jesus is to belong to God and gain eternal life; to reject him is to reject God and forfeit that life.

#### *What Do You Think?*

Which accounts from Jesus’ life illustrate best for you that he is God’s righteous king? How do these shape how you live?

#### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

Accounts of action (preaching, teaching, etc.)

Accounts of reaction (response to critics, etc.)

Accounts of passivity (allowing himself to be crucified, etc.)

### **B. Prayer**

Father, along with all creation we bow before your Son as our king. May he lead us to submit to your supreme authority in every aspect of our lives. We pray this in his name. Amen.

### **C. Thought to Remember**

Seek the guidance of the Son.

## INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

### **Into the Lesson**

Ask learners to identify some Old Testament figures who heard the voice of God or witnessed miracles. Then ask learners to name some Old Testament kings who received God’s divine appointment.

Say, “The Jews of Jesus’ day were no strangers to miracles. Their history was full of accounts of God’s chosen prophets and leaders, as well as encounters with angels. When Jesus came, many recognized that he was different from any prophet or king who had come before him. Yet keeping that conviction proved challenging for some when they experienced pressure to dismiss Jesus as a mere prophet. Today’s lesson text reaffirms for us who Jesus is and where he stands in relationship to God, the angels, and mankind.”

*Alternative.* Before learners arrive, place in chairs copies of the “Identity of Jesus” activity from the reproducible page, which you can download. Allow learners several minutes to work individually on the activity. Then say, “In today’s culture, there is sometimes pressure to dismiss Jesus as a mere philosopher, prophet, or role model. Early Jews who became followers of Jesus experienced a similar pressure, but in today’s text we are reminded of the true nature of Jesus and encouraged to worship and serve him appropriately.”

### **Into the Word**

Divide learners into three groups. Give the first group an index card labeled *God* ([Hebrews 1:1-3](#)), the second group an index card labeled *Angels* ([Hebrews 1:4-7](#)), and the third group an index card labeled *Kings* ([Hebrews 1:8, 9](#)).

Have the groups read together the portion of the lesson text indicated on their cards, then discuss where the writer of Hebrews says Jesus, referred to in the text as “the Son,” stands in relation to God, angels, or kings, as indicated by the groups’ index cards.

Allow time for small-group discussion. Then ask a speaker from each group to read aloud their assigned verses and to share with the class their findings. Jot the responses on the board. (Possible responses: *God*—God speaks through Jesus, he appointed Jesus as heir of all things, Jesus is the glory of God, Jesus is the express image of God, Jesus sits at God’s right hand; *Angels*—Jesus is so much better than the angels, all the angels of God worship Jesus, none of the angels is called God’s begotten Son and Jesus is; *Kings*—Jesus sits on the throne of God forever, Jesus is above all other kings. Ask, “What do all these phrases and comparisons tell us about the identity of Jesus?” (Possible responses: Jesus



is the Son of God, Jesus is God, Jesus is the king of all, Jesus is the way to salvation.)

## Into Life

Pair learners to discuss this question: “In light of everything Hebrews tells us about Jesus’ identity, what are some ways we can exhibit greater submission to him?” Ask for volunteers to share thoughts with the class. Possible responses: Bible study ([2 Timothy 3:14-17](#); etc.), prayer ([Matthew 6:9-15](#); [Luke 18:1](#); etc.), confession ([James 5:16](#); [1 John 1:9](#); etc.), stewardship ([2 Corinthians 9:7](#); [Philippians 4:14-16](#); etc.), serving others ([Matthew 25:31-40](#); [2 Corinthians 8:1-5](#); etc.), forgiving one another ([Matthew 18:21, 22](#); [Colossians 3:13](#); etc.), sharing the gospel ([Matthew 28:19, 20](#); [Romans 10:12-15](#); etc.), emulating Christ ([1 John 2:6](#); etc.).

Use this discussion to note that Jesus’ identity as the Son of God reveals God’s glory and teaches us how we should live, while his identity as the supreme king merits our submission in all aspects of our lives.

*Option.* Distribute copies of the “At the King’s Throne” activity from the reproducible page. Have learners complete the activity on their own. Say, “It is important we remember Jesus is not only our loving Savior but also our righteous king.”