

HEBREWS & THE GENERAL EPISTLES

- Other early Christians imitated Paul & wrote "letters" to encourage the faithful
- Not addressed to individual churches but to Christian community as a whole
- The General (Catholic) Epistles:
 - James
 - Jude
 - 1 & 2 Peter
 - 1, 2, 3 John
- "catholic" = "universal"

HEBREWS

- Less of a letter and more of a sermon letter isn't addressed to anyone in particular.
- Almost certainly not written by Paul but written by an "accomplished stylist" (Harris)
- Combines allegorical interpretation of Hebrew Bible with Greek philosophy
- Written for Christian community at large
- Written sometime between 65-100 CE.

OUTLINE OF HEBREWS

1:1-3 Introduction

1:4-10:18 Christ's Superiority

» Over the angels (1:4-2:18)

» Over Moses as prophet (3:1-4:13)

» Jesus as the High Priest (4:14-10:18)

10:19-12:29 Faith & Endurance

» A Cloud of Witnesses (11:1-12:2)

13:1-15 Conclusion & Blessings

A DUALISTIC VIEW

- Writer equally acquainted with Greek versions of Hebrew Bible (our Old Testament) & Greek philosophy
- Assumes two parallel worlds (Platonic):
 - Eternal realm of spirit (above)
 - Inferior, changing world (below)
- Priest in Hebrew understanding was "mediator" between God & humanity
- Hebrews is only Biblical writer to present Jesus as "heavenly priest" serving as mediator between two worlds (no image of "messiah")

1:4–2:18: CHRIST IS SUPERIOR TO THE ANGELS (CHRIST IS THE MEDIATOR)

Role of angel – mediators of God's Word in law of Israel & attendants in heavenly court

1:3-4 – Jesus' superiority over angels. Reiterated again in 2:9

1:5-13 – Various quotations from Hebrew Bible (OT), mostly Psalms. Almost like a scholar gathering citations to prove his case. Very well thought-out & presented.

1:4–2:18: CHRIST IS SUPERIOR TO THE ANGELS (CHRIST IS THE MEDIATOR)

Each case of Jesus' superiority followed up by "moral exhortation" – how theology should affect the life of the faithful.

Usually led with word "Therefore"

2:1-4 – Moral exhortation – heed Jesus' "mediation" above angels

3:1-4:13: CHRIST IS SUPERIOR TO MOSES
(CHRIST IS THE PROPHET)

3:1-3 – In Hebrew Bible, Moses is first & most famous prophet (one who speaks God's Word to God's people). Jesus is higher than Moses.

Like previous section, writer quotes Hebrew Bible (3:7-11), this time using image of Exodus.

4:1ff – "Therefore..." – Moral exhortation is to listen to prophetic Word of Jesus & not have their hearts hardened (like pharaoh)

4:14-10:18: CHRIST IS SUPERIOR TO AARON (CHRIST IS THE HIGH PRIEST)

Priest in Hebrew understanding was "mediator" between God & humanity.

4:14-16 - Heart of Hebrews - Jesus as THE High Priest.

6:1ff – "Therefore..." Moral exhortation is to "go toward perfection" & mature in the faith.

Chpt 7 – Superiority of Christ's priesthood over Levitical priesthood, represented in Aaron & Melchizedek

4:14-10:18: CHRIST IS SUPERIOR TO AARON (CHRIST IS THE HIGH PRIEST)

Who is this Melchizedek ???

- Priest who blessed Abraham in OT
- Rarely mentioned in Bible 10 total; 8 alone in Hebrews.
- Pictured by writer as representative figure; sort of "grandfather" of all priests.

8:1-2 - Reiterates heart of Hebrews in 4:14-16

11:1-12:2 – A CLOUD OF WITNESSES

A marvelous "chronology of faith"

Meant to inspire followers of Jesus & remind them that they are not alone in their quest to be faithful

Lists a "who's who" of Hebrew Bible:

- "By faith (name)"
- Followed by their story/what they did

Abel, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, etc.

12:1-2 - "Therefore...." Moral exhortation: "run the race," keep the faith, look to Jesus.

SUMMARY OF HEBREWS

- More like a sermon
- Not addressed to anyone in particular Christian community at large
- Almost certainly not written by Paul
- Combines allegorical interpretation of Hebrew Bible with Greek philosophy
- Key themes:
 - Jesus as new High Priest
 - Followers of Jesus are part of "cloud of witnesses"



OVERVIEW OF JAMES

- One of the seven "catholic epistles"
- Traditionally held to be written by James, brother of Jesus who eventually became leader of Jerusalem church. But it probably was written as a pseudonym much later.
- If so, written in late first century (80-100 CE)
- A Jewish-Christian anthology of ethical instruction. Teaches an ethic of faith and love

OVERVIEW OF JAMES

- Highlights importance of "works" in Christian faith, and speaks out about favoritism & discrimination (around wealth/poverty)
- Letter written not to new Christians to help guide them in faith, but to already established Christians who should "know better."
- No real "outline" like other letters appears to lack in unity & coherence, which may suggest compilation of fragments.

DANGERS OF FAVORITISM & DISCRIMINATION (2:1-9)

Speaks primarily along lines of rich & poor – apparently those with \$\$ were getting preferential treatment in church

Vs. 5b – what gospel does this remind you of??

Vs. 9 – implores Christian community to an ethic of impartiality – treating everyone the same.

James provides NT's most severe criticism of rich.

FAITH AND WORKS (2:14-26)

Previous section about favoritism/discrimination builds into next section on works

James criticized down through history for promoting a "works-righteousness" doctrine (salvation achieved not through faith but through works). Martin Luther was one of strongest critics

At face value, appears to be anti-Pauline, as Paul was all about salvation through faith apart from works.

FAITH AND WORKS (2:14-26)

HOWEVER – is James really anti-Pauline??

For Paul, "works" = "works of the Law" – Torah.

No need for obedience to "old covenant"

now that Jesus is here

For James, "works" = the living out of faith.

James speaking people already Christian & intellectually believe in Jesus but haven't translated that belief into life practice.

FAITH AND WORKS (2:14-26)

HOWEVER – is James really anti-Pauline??

James advocates that works (not ritual works prescribed by the Law, but behavior that reflects love) must correspond to one's faith

On this, Paul would agree!

A HUMAN ETHIC OF LOVE (5:13-19)

Celebrating life as a community & caring for those in need:

Suffering....should pray

Cheerful....should sing songs of praise

Sick...should call for elders of church to anoint them

Vs. 16 – confess sins to each other, pray for each other.

"CONFESSION BOOTH" HANDOUT

OVERVIEW OF JUDE

- Date of origin heavily disputed best scholarly efforts point to late 1st century/ early 2nd century.
- No chapters books is only 25 verses long
- Writer identifies himself as "brother of James," but content almost certainly points to a later date than contemporary of Jesus.
- Less of a true letter & more of a "tract" imploring the "beloved" to avoid influence of an unidentified group of "malcontents."

OVERVIEW OF JUDE

- Vs. 4 Jude introduces the malcontents. Not necessarily preaching false doctrine, but reviled more for their bad behaviors:
 - "intruders"
 - "licentiousness"
 - "ungodly"
 - "defile the flesh" (vs. 8)
 - "reject authority" (vs. 8)
 - "slander the glorious ones" (vs. 8)
 - "grumblers" (vs. 16)
 - "indulge in their own lusts" (vs. 16)
 - "bombastic in speech" (vs. 16)

JUDE'S USE OF SCRIPTURE

Jude is very well-versed in Hebrew Bible, as well as other such writings, and uses them to shed light on his situation:

- 1. Use of Images from Hebrew Bible (11b)
 - Jude refers to three individuals to describe the current malcontents' folly:
- Cain the murderer (Gen. 4:9)
- Balaam, who prophesied for gain (Num. 22)
- Korah, who rebelled (Num. 16)

JUDE'S USE OF SCRIPTURE

- Use of <u>1 Enoch</u>, Apocalyptic writing (14-15)
- 1 Enoch is collection of apocalyptic writings dating from 3rd century BCE to first century CE not part of traditional Biblical canon

Enoch was great-grandfather of Noah, listed in genealogy in Gen. 5

Jude has high regard for these writings & quotes them to support his thesis – one of the few New Testament writers to do so.

1,2 PETER AND 1,2,3 JOHN

 Some scholars believe it was written by apostle Peter. Most, however, see it as a pseudonymous writing around 70-90 CE.

Letter most likely written from Rome

 Written to Christian community undergoing either imperial persecution or alienation by pagan society

Uses "exile language"

- "Exile language" hearkens back to formative event in Jewish history
- 587 BCE Jerusalem destroyed by Babylonians & most Hebrews were taken to Babylon to live in captivity. Displaced for a generation without a home; didn't belong.
- Writer of <u>1 Peter</u> uses exile image to describe current plight of church:
 - 1:1ff "To the exiles of the Dispersion..." –
 early church was scattered everywhere
 - 5:13 "sister church in Babylon" was code for "Rome" (see <u>Revelation</u>)

IMPERIAL PERSECUTION OR SOCIETAL ALIENATION?

- Might have been written during reign of Roman emperor Domitian (95 CE) – known for being hostile to Christians
- On the other hand, the "suffering" may be constant clash with pagan society & Christian vilification (2:12, 3:16)
- 4:12ff "fiery ordeal"/"trial by fire?"
- Whatever the case, Christians are encouraged to remain steadfast & faithful

- Almost certainly pseudonymous (moreso than any other NT letter)
- Last NT book to be written circa 130 CE.
- Incorporates large portions of <u>Jude</u> 4-18 (2: 2-17)
- Like <u>Jude</u>, warns against false teachers
- 2:10bff long description of what false teachers are like (not flattering – see vs. 22!)

- Primary goal is to reinstate the early Christian apocalyptic hope of the Parousia – folks were starting to doubt (almost 100 years after Jesus' death)
- 3:3-4 signs of the second coming
- 3:8ff very hopeful words to those waiting
 - Vs. 8 for God, the delay is not long at all.
 Encourages readers to try & see things from God's perspective.
 - vs. 10a echoes Paul in <u>1 Thessalonians</u>

LETTERS FROM THE JOHANNINE <u>COMMUNITY</u>

- Gives us important insight into the Johannine community, along with the gospel of <u>John</u>.
- Most scholars think the same person wrote all three letters – and that it was not the gospel writer or the apostle John
- Letters are dated in the early part of the second century

<u> 1 JOHN</u>

- Written around same time as Gospel of <u>John</u> (100 CE)
- Some belief that writer of the gospel also wrote this letter. If not same writer, most certainly from same Johannine tradition.
- Evokes very similar language/image as gospel <u>John</u> does: light & darkness (2:7-11), love (4:7-21), etc.
- Written as a "sermon" against former members who had recently withdrawn from the Johannine community

TWO THEMES IN 1 JOHN:

JESUS "IN THE FLESH"

- 4:1-3 Secessionists denied that Jesus was a real person. Might have been Gnostics or Docetists, who believed that "the Christ" was a divine Revealer who temporarily occupied Jesus' body.
- 2:18ff refers to secessionists as "anti-Christs"
 against the truth of Christ
- 1:1-7 Fellowship in the risen Christ, who can be seen/touched/heard.

TWO THEMES IN 1 JOHN:

GOD IS LOVE

- 4:7-21 True Christians imitate the love that God has shown
- God's love has been shown in the death of Jesus
- Love is what holds the Christian fellowship community together

2 JOHN

- Only 13 verses long shortest book of the Bible by verses
- Writer identifies himself as the "elder" (Greek: presbyter). Denotes someone of position & authority in house church.
- Along with 3 John, almost certainly not same person as gospel writer
- Written around 100 CE
- As 1 John, written to warn against "antichrists" who deny Jesus "in the flesh" (vs. 7)

3 JOHN

- Shortest book in the New Testament by word count
- Written by the "presbyter" to an individual,
 Gaius, a friend of the writer. Personal letter.
- Wants Gaius to extend hospitality to some Johannine missionaries coming his way.
- Vs. 11 (esp. b) very Johannine understanding of faith – how we live shows if God or evil is in us.

Next week.....

