

## Unique Sermonic Structure

- Considered by many scholars to be more polished and eloquent than any other book of the New Testament.
  - Reads more like a sermon transcript that could be picked up and preached.

**Hebrew 13:22** I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation

### **Acts 13:13 – 16**

**13** Now Paul and his companions set sail from Paphos and came to Perga in Pamphylia. And John left them and returned to Jerusalem,

**14** but they went on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia. And on the Sabbath day they went into the synagogue and sat down.

**15** After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the rulers of the synagogue sent a message to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have any word of encouragement for the people, say it.”

**16** So Paul stood up, and motioning with his hand said: “Men of Israel and you who fear God, listen.

## Who is the Writer?

- The writer of this letter is anonymous, and people have wondered for a long time whether Paul or maybe one of his co-workers like Barnabas, Apollos, or Aquilla wrote it.
  - Really, we just don't know...

### **Hebrews 2:3 - 4**

**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.

- So, the author had a first-hand relationship with the disciples, who were eyewitnesses of Jesus.
  - So, we know that this letter is anchored in the apostles' teaching.

Additionally, at the end of the letter, we get a little more information:

### **Hebrews 13:22 - 24**

**22** I appeal to you, brothers, bear with my word of exhortation, for I have written to you briefly.

**23** You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon.

**24** Greet all your leaders and all the saints. Those who come from Italy send you greetings.

- So, he has a ministry relationship with Timothy, who will be released from jail soon.
  - He is known by and sends greetings to the audience's leaders and saints from Italy.
  - He intends to come to visit the audience with Timothy.

*“Who actually wrote the epistle, only God knows...”* – Origen, 254 A.D. (cited by Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History 6.25.14)

## Who is the Audience?

- We don't know who the audience of this letter was or even where they lived.
  - But again, the author knows them really well, and they know him.
- All the earliest manuscripts we have of this book have the phrase "to the Hebrews" before what we know as the first verse.
  - So, the intended audience is ethnically Hebrew and living in the 1<sup>st</sup> century.

**Acts 24:14** But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets,

### **Acts 26:6 – 7**

**6** And now I stand here on trial because of my hope in the promise made by God to our fathers,  
**7** to which our twelve tribes hope to attain, as they earnestly worship night and day.

- He assumes that they have a thorough knowledge of the Old Testament scriptures, especially the storyline of the first five books of the Bible or the Torah.
  - Much will be considered in a New Covenant context about:
    - How Abraham's family became the nation of Israel,
    - How Moses led them out of slavery in Egypt
    - How at Mount Sinai they received the Torah
    - How they made a covenant with God as his people
    - How they built a tabernacle for his worship and dwelling
    - How the priests offered sacrifices
    - How they wandered through the wilderness on their way to the Promised Land.
- We also have clues from **chapter 10** that the audience was facing persecution and imprisonment because of their association with Jesus.
  - And that they should recall and renew the courage they had under similar pressures in the earlier days of their faith. They would need a word of exhortation!
  - Perhaps many of these were there in the early days of the church of Jerusalem in the early chapters of **Acts**?
- This explains much of the admonishing (warning) tone of the letter.
  - Some were drawing back from their faith because the cost of following Christ was high.
    - While others were abandoning the faith altogether.
  - Meanwhile, others have not yet believed and need to accept Christ as their savior because there is no other sacrifice for sins.
    - There were likely unconverted Jews in the audience, such as spouses, siblings, and other family ties.

## The Structure

- **Short Introduction (1:1 - 3)**: Jesus is *better*.
  - **First Section of Comparison (chapters 1 and 2)**:
    - Jesus is *better* than the Angels and the Torah.
    - Warning: Don't neglect the greater salvation! (2:1 – 4)
  - **Second Section of Comparison (chapters 3 and 4)**:
    - Jesus is *better* than Moses and the Promised Land.
    - Warning: Don't neglect the greater rest! (3:7 – 19)
  - **Third Section of Comparison (chapters 5 to 7)**:
    - Jesus is *better* than the priests and Melchizedek.
    - Warning: Don't neglect the greater gift! (6:4 – 8)
  - **Fourth Section of Comparison (chapters 8 to 10)**:
    - Jesus is *better* than all the sacrifices of the old covenant.
    - Warning: Don't neglect the greater sacrifice! (10:26 – 39)
- **Conclusion (chapters 11 to 13)**:
  - Have faith and hope to follow like our heroes before us, no matter what.

### Short Introduction (1:1 - 3): Jesus is the *true* and *better* everything.

- The epistle's theme to exalt Jesus is made clear to us immediately by the introduction.
  - In the past, God spoke to our ancestors in many different ways, but now, in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son...
  - He shows that Jesus is superior to all the previous ways God revealed himself to Israel.

### First Section of Comparison (chapters 1 and 2): Jesus is better than the angels and the Torah.

- In Jewish tradition, it was taught based on **Deuteronomy 33:2** that angels delivered the Torah to Moses at Mount Sinai.

#### **Deuteronomy 33:2 - 4**

**2** He said, "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.

**3** Yes, he loved his people, all his holy ones were in his hand; so they followed in your steps, receiving direction from you,

**4** when Moses commanded us a law, as a possession for the assembly of Jacob.

- This was the old message and messengers...
  - And so, by saying Jesus is superior to angels, the author claims that Jesus and his message of good news are superior to all previous messengers and messages of God's word.

## Hebrews: Christ the True and Better - Introduction

- And not only that, but given Jesus' status high above angels, how remarkable is it that he did not come to rescue angels despite that high status?
  - Instead, he came as a human to suffer and to die for us! (**Hebrews 2:14 – 16**)

The first of many warnings flows from these significant comparisons:

- **Don't neglect the greater salvation!**
  - If Israel was commanded to pay attention to the Torah that angels delivered,
    - how much more should we pay attention to the message that the Son of God announced?

### **Hebrews 2:1 - 4**

**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.

Second Section of Comparison (chapters 3 and 4): Jesus is better than Moses and the Promised Land.

- Now, the author argues that Jesus is superior to Moses, who led the people of Israel through the wilderness and built the Tabernacle.
  - Jesus is also the leader of God's people, but in Him, we see not the builder of just a tent but of a new creation.
- Then, the author retells how the Israelites rebelled against Moses in the wilderness.
  - They lost their chance to enter the rest God offered them in the Promised Land.

Here is the second warning:

- **Don't neglect the greater rest!**
  - If Jesus is more excellent than Moses, how much higher are the stakes if we rebel against him?

### **Hebrews 3:8 – 11**

**8** do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness,

**9** where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years.

**10** Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, 'They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.'

**11** As I swore in my wrath, 'They shall not enter my rest.'"

**12** Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.

- We also are in a wilderness-like environment where we must trust God for the future rest in God's new creation.
  - So, let's ensure we don't rebel like Israel did in the wilderness and lose out on God's gracious offer to enter his new creation.

## Hebrews: Christ the True and Better - Introduction

### Third Section of Comparison (chapters 5 to 7): Jesus is better than the priests and Melchizedek

- **Hebrews** then compares Jesus with Israel's priests from the line of Aaron.
  - Their role was to represent Israel before God and offer sacrifices to cover sins.
- But the priests were themselves flawed as people.
  - They constantly had to offer sacrifices for their own sins as well as for everybody else's.
  - Also, they, as men, kept dying, and new priests needed to take their place.
- This was always a temporary and imperfect system of mediation.
  - Something more was always intended.
- Jesus is the true and better priest, but he did not come from the line of Aaron,
  - Jesus is a priest in the order of Melchizedek.
    - A mysterious priest/king from ancient Jerusalem
    - Who appears once in the story about Abraham, and he honored him.
  - We also find in **Psalm 110** that the messianic King from the line of David
    - will be a "priest in the order of Melchizedek."
- So, with a greater line than Aaron as a priest and after the line of David...
  - makes Jesus the ultimate priest/King
- He's morally flawless (and needs to offer no sacrifices for himself),
  - And he lives forever - his priesthood has no beginning or end.

Then comes his warning in this section:

- **Don't neglect the greater gift!**
  - To reject Jesus is to deny one's best and only chance to be fully reconciled to God, so don't do that.

#### **Hebrews 6:4 – 6**

**4** For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit,

**5** and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,

**6** and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.

## Hebrews: Christ the True and Better - Introduction

Fourth Section of Comparison (chapters 8 to 10): Jesus is better than all the sacrifices of the old covenant

- Jesus' death on the cross was the ultimate sacrifice,
  - superior to all the animal sacrifices offered in the temple.
- Those sacrifices had to be offered constantly,
  - both daily, and also yearly on the Day of Atonement.
- But Jesus offered his life once and for all and was sufficient to cover the whole world.

The last warning is this:

- **Don't neglect the greater sacrifice!**
  - Walking away from Jesus is turning your back on a gracious offer of God's forgiveness,

### Hebrews 10:26 - 29

**26** For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,

**27** but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.

**28** Anyone who has set aside the law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses.

**29** How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace?

- Jesus' sacrifice is permanent and complete - there will be no more to cover sins...
  - It is the foundation for the new covenant spoken of by all the prophets before.
    - Don't miss it!

Conclusion (chapters 11 to 13): Have faith and hope like our heroes before us

- After spending ten chapters elevating Jesus, the letter concludes with: what are we to do?
  - Follow him, no matter the cost!
- **In Jesus, we have found God's very word**
  - A greater message - delivered by a greater messenger
- **In Jesus, we have hope for the new creation**
  - A greater leader with a greater promise of rest
- **Jesus is our eternal priest/king**
  - A greater gift by a greater mediator
- **Jesus is the last sacrifice for sins**
  - A greater sacrifice - once and for all
- So now, we should follow all the great models of faith found throughout the scriptures.
  - Assured that God will never, no, never forsake his people.
- Be inspired to follow in the footsteps of faith and hope before us.
  - Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Issac, Jacob, Moses, Rahab, David...
    - And by the chief of all examples: Jesus