Hebrews and General Epistles

• World view of Hebrews
• Christology of Hebrews
• Salvation in Hebrews
• General Epistles

World View of Hebrews

• World view seems to combine Jewish and Greco-Roman elements.
  – Often connected with the type of Hellenistic Judaism found in Alexandria.
  – Jewish thought influenced by Platonism, Philo.
  – David deSilva - understand it by means of Greco-Roman institution of patronage.
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World View of Hebrews

• Twofold dualism (G. E. Ladd):
  – Heavenly/earthly - chapter 8-9
    • Earthly sanctuary is copy and shadow of heavenly.
    • Both must be purified.
  – Present age/age to come (already/not yet)
    • “These last days” (1:2); the “end of the age” (9:26).
    • The Day of the Lord is approaching (10:25).
    • Coming age, time of the new order (2:5, 8; 9:10).
  – Two ages connected by Kingdom of God idea.

World View of Hebrews

• Concept of faith is eschatological.
  – Heb. 11:1 - the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.
  – Often interpreted as 2 different things: hope for coming redemption, assurance of (Platonic?) heavenly realities.
  – But may be parallelism: things not yet seen.
  – Closely related to hope.

World View of Hebrews

• Deals explicitly with old and new covenants.
• Jesus instituted new covenant (8:8-12).
  – Old and new as promise and fulfillment.
  – Use of typology to express this relationship.
  – Shadow vs. substance (10:1).
• Old covenant was faulty (8:7).
  – Can’t deal permanently with sin (10:4).
  – Requires endless sacrifices.
  – Serves to remind people of sin (10:1-3).

World View of Hebrews

• New covenant better than old (7:22).
  – Based on better promises (8:6).
  – Based on better sacrifice (9:14, 23).
  – Instituted by better mediator (8:6).
  – Creates a new heart in people (8:13; 10:9).
• Old covenant is obsolete and has been abolished (8:13; 10:9).
Christology of Hebrews

• Very rich Christology.
• Clear teaching on Jesus’ humanity.
  – Made like us in every way (2:17).
  – Suffered as human being (5:7).
  – Learned obedience as human being (5:8).
  – Tempted in all ways as we are (4:15).
  – Because he was tempted, he can help those who are tempted (2:18).
  – Called an apostle (3:1) - i.e., one sent by God.

Christology of Hebrews

• Explicit teaching on Jesus’ divinity.
  – Mediator and sustainer of creation (1:2-3).
  – Preeminent agent of God's revelation (1:2).
  – Reflects God’s glory and is true image of his nature (1:3).
  – Unique son of God (1:2) who came into the world, suggesting preexistence (10:5).
  – Angels worship him (1:6).
  – Exalted and interceding for us (1:3-4; 7:25).

Christology of Hebrews

• Image of Jesus as high priest unique to Hebrews. What does it mean?

Christology of Hebrews

• Some similarities with human priesthood.
  – Chosen by God (5:5).
  – Had to be human to serve as high priest (2:17-18).
  – Presented a sacrifice to God on behalf of the people (8:3).

Christology of Hebrews

• Some differences from human priesthood.
  – Sinless; didn’t sacrifice for himself (4:15; 7:27).
  – Both high priest and sinless sacrifice (9:14).
  – Sacrifice was once for all (7:27; 10:10).
  – Sat down at God's right hand (10:12).
  – Obtained eternal redemption (9:12).
  – Permanent priesthood; he lives forever (7:23).
  – Priest-king like Melchizedek (6:20; 7:3, 16-17).

Christology of Hebrews

• O. Cullmann: this is the most complete Christological image in the NT.
  – Covers all of Christ’s work.
  – Image of earth as the vestibule or outer court of heaven, which is the sanctuary.
  – Priest makes sacrifice, enters sanctuary to present it, then comes back outside to proclaim to people that sacrifice has been accepted.
  – Jesus’ ministry fits this model...
Christology of Hebrews

• Two distinctive terms for Christ:
  – **Archegos** - pioneer, champion (2:10; 12:2).
    • Climax of “faith hall of fame” in chapter 11.
    • Acts as our champion (like David), leads us into the promised land (like Joshua).
    • Goes ahead of us and secures the way.
    • Enters presence of God and guarantees access of those who follow him.
    • Cullmann: like Paul’s idea of “firstborn from the dead.”

Salvation in Hebrews

• Distinctive soteriology (see handout).
• Overarching idea = approaching God.
  – Opposite is turning away or withdrawing.
  – Horizontal = pilgrimage of faith toward eschatological goal.
  – Vertical = entering the sanctuary.
• Priesthood of all believers is implied.
  – Chapter 10 Day of Atonement imagery.
  – Access to presence of God.
  – We have an altar (13:10); can offer acceptable worship (12:28); can offer sacrifices of praise and good works (13:15-16).
Salvation in Hebrews

- Sanctification is important concept.
  - Vocation: we must pursue (12:14).
- Perfection has same range as sanctification.
  - Jesus makes us perfect forever (10:14).
  - We’re to go on toward perfection (6:1).

Salvation in Hebrews

- Receive salvation by repentance & faith (6:1).
- Connection between faith and obedience.
  - Jesus learned obedience and became the source of salvation for those who obey him (5:8-9).
  - See importance of perseverance in chapter 11.
  - Faith is laying hold of the promises of God and acting on them (Ladd).
  - Obedience needed to inherit promises (10:36).

Salvation in Hebrews

- Hebrews warns against apostasy.
  - Strong warnings about falling away (2:1, 3; 3:12-14; 6:4-8; 10:26-31).
  - People who showed all the evidence of Christian commitment denying the faith under persecution.
  - If people deliberately reject the salvation in Christ, there is no hope for them.

Salvation in Hebrews

- What aspects of the theology of Hebrews would be helpful to you in your setting?
- What aspects might be difficult or problematic or particularly challenging?

General Epistles

- Also called “catholic” (universal) epistles.
- Most addressed to the universal church.
- Includes James; 1 and 2 Peter; 1, 2, and 3 John; Jude.
- A few distinctives...

General Epistles

- Theology of James?
General Epistles

- Theology of 1 and 2 Peter?

General Epistles

- Theology of Jude?

General Epistles

- Johannine epistles
  - Dualistic language
  - Christology
  - Eternal life
  - Nature of Christian life, especially sin and love
  - Assurance and discernment ("This is how you know...")
  - Similar themes in Gospel of John