

A. Eschatological Structure (the situation of the church):  
defining factors

1. Christology (1:1-2) Hebrews 1:1-2 <sup>NT</sup> Hebrews 1:1  
Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως πάλαι ὁ θεὸς λαλήσας τοῖς πατράσιν  
ἐν τοῖς προφήταις <sup>2</sup> ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων ἐλάλησεν  
ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ, Long ago, at many times and in many  
ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,
  - a) Here we have in this opening statement, what the  
writer surely intends to provide, an overarching  
outlook: an umbrella declaration. He is placing a  
canopy about everything else he is going to say in  
the document. What the writer provides here is a  
redemptive historical perspective/orientation. All  
is put in a redemptive historical or covenant  
historical perspective—this is *very* explicit.
  - b) The controlling idea—nuclear assertion, is *God has  
spoken*. God speech is the central theme as much  
as anything else (this occurs elsewhere in the  
book).
    - (1) The author expresses himself by means of a  
contrast drawn within the speaking of God and  
especially a contrast viewing the speaking of  
God as a historical activity.
    - (2) This verse supplies a deep structural locus for  
what Vos called attention to as the history of  
special revelation.
      - (a) Revelation comes into view in that God  
speaks.
        - (i) God speaks equally in the historical  
periods under consideration.
        - (ii) It is not the absence of divine  
communication in the former period that  
gives way to the presence of such  
communication in the new period.
        - (iii) Rather, it is the case that God's speech,  
God's verbal revelation, is the constant  
feature in both eras.

- (b) History comes into view given the nature of the contrasts that are established: long ago/last days.
- (3) We can note then that the contrast is seen in the prepositional phrases used by the writer.
  - (a) ἐν τοῖς προφήταις *In the prophets*.
  - (b) ἐν υἱῷ, *In a Son*. God's speaking in Christ is juxtaposed to his speaking in the prophets. This is synecdochal of the entirety of revelation.
    - (i) The author of Hebrews seeks to encompass the sum-total of redemptive revelation in these two phrases.
    - (ii) And the construal of the revelation in the prophets warrants some attention.
      - (a) First, the adverb πάλαι. This accents the "long ago" character of the revelation. That is, this accents the past historical character of the revelation in view.
        - (i) There is a clear historical conception underlying the author's conception of God's speech in the prophets.
        - (ii) Revelation, while having an unconditioned divine author, is nonetheless given within the matrix of redemptive history.
      - (b) Second, the multiformity of God's revelation is accented by the adverbs Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως.
        - (i) That is, while God remains the subject who speaks, there is a multi-facted pluriformity to his speech.
        - (ii) The various times and places of God's speech to the fathers in the prophets accents that it is not the instrumentality of

human agents that accounts for diversity, but God himself. God is the one who speaks on the pluriform ways that he does.

- (iii) And this diversity within God's self-revelation finds its ultimate rationale not in the varying historical needs of his people, but within the divine life itself. God is not an ultimate unity, devoid of plurality, but he is equally one and equally many.
  - (iv) As such, his revelation in history will display features of both unity and diversity.
  - (v) It will never do for us to ascribe unity in Scripture to divine authorship and diversity in Scripture to human authorship, as though God is a bare unity and in some way needs humanity to supply a principle of diversity. That will never do! That is a species of Neo-Hegelianism and has nothing substantially in common with Christian Theism.
- (4) Moreover, I want to call attention to a grammatical feature that is worthy of our consideration.
- (a) Notice that the subject who speaks is God, yet the instrumental means by which he speaks in the past is the prophets (instrumental dative).
  - (b) God speaks in the prophets of the Old Covenant.

- (i) This text reminds us that the nature of God's revelation in redemptive history is that it is a divine-human character, and in that order.
  - (a) God speaks, yet it is in or by the instrumental agency of the prophets that he speaks.
  - (b) What the prophets spoke, God spoke. This the author's way of getting at those OT phenomena that locate prophetic utterance as of divine origin and authority.
    - (i) Remember, that the *actual words* of God were placed in the mouths of the prophets in the Old Testament (4:15 "Now you shall speak to him and put the words in his mouth. And I will be with your mouth and with his mouth, and I will teach you what to do"; Jer. 1:9 "The Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth, and the Lord said to me: 'Behold, I have put my words in your mouth.'").
    - (ii) There are a couple of different ways we can put the matter. We could say that the prophet's word was God's word, or that God's word was the prophet's word, but the point is simply that the word of the prophet and the word of the Lord are *identical*. The prophet's word is God's word.
    - (iii) The authority ascribed to God is ascribed to the prophet, since the prophet bears the

actual words of God Himself. That is, the prophet does not have divine ideas which are then articulated in his own fallible words; rather, he possesses the very words of God himself. These are clear indications of verbal inspiration.

- (iv) O.T. prophets accordingly introduced their words with the formula “Thus says the Lord”, thereby *identifying* their words with God’s words. **Jer. 7:3** “Thus says the Lord, ‘Amend your ways and I will cause you to dwell in this place.’” It is the word of the Lord, not the word of the prophet per se, which Jeremiah announces. This formula, then, identifies the word of the prophet as the word of the Lord. **Jer. 7: 28** “This is a nation which does not obey the voice of the Lord.” The rejection of the prophet’s message is construed as disobedience to the voice of the Lord. This is just another way of expressing that the word of the prophet is equivalent to the voice of the Lord.
- (v) This yields the following phenomenon. Biblical authors can use God says and Scripture says *interchangeably*. **Ro. 9:17** “For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘For this very

purpose, I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.”

However, **Exodus 9:16** makes clear that *God* said what we find recorded in Ro. 9:17.

Perhaps closer to home in Hebrews: Ps. 95 was written more than likely by David, but Hebrews 3:7 refers to Ps. 95 produced by the Holy Spirit. Hence, in this case the words Scripture in the OT through the Psalmist are the words of the Holy Spirit.

- (c) No notion of a disjunct between the two exists, such that God’s speech is somehow obfuscated or transformed by the secondary agency of the human author.
- (ii) God is the primary author of inscripturated revelation, and the pluriformity and human authorship involved in that revelation in no way serve as impediments to be overcome; rather, God’s historically diverse revelation bears his absolute authority as He is the divine author of Scripture.
  - (a) And given that such is the case, what can we make of the analogue to the prophets in a Son?
    - (i) We can say at least this. Prophetic revelation in the OT bears a christological feature. The Son as word of God and the divine agent through whom God speaks provides an archetypal pattern that gives a

christological grounding to the prophets as agents through whom God speaks.

- (ii) There is an analogy developed at a deep theological level between the prophets, on the one hand, and the Son, on the other hand.
  - (iii) Just as the Son, in the fullness of his humanity, speaks an authoritative word from God, likewise the prophets.
  - (iv) And it is not only the case that a general analogy is being drawn, but as we will see soon, the Son actually supplies the pattern that the prophets both replicate and anticipate. As human agents through whom God speaks with absolute authority, they are replicas of the incarnate Son—creaturely adumbrations of a future, eschatological reality found in the theanthropic one.
- (b) It is very likely that the author of Hebrews is seeking here to open up the eschatological vistas of Hebrews 18:15-18 “**Deuteronomy 18:15-18** <sup>15</sup> "The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers- it is to him you shall listen- <sup>16</sup> just as you desired of the LORD your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God or see this great fire any more, lest I die.' <sup>17</sup> And the LORD said to me, 'They are right in what they have spoken. <sup>18</sup> I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.”

- (i) Viewed then in eschatological perspective, Christ is the prophet greater than Moses.
- (ii) And notice the correlation here: his words are in his mouth, so that his speech is God's speech.
- (iii) The major disjunct between the prophets of the OC and the Son is this: that in order for the identity between divine and human speech to be effected a supernatural act of inspiration had to occur, whereas for the Son, given the reality of the hypostatic union, the speech of the Son is natively divine. What the incarnate Son says is actually God speaking, without any additional superintending activity of the Holy Spirit.
- (iv) This is even more intensely and directly revelatory of God's Word and therefore helps us grasp the way that incarnation supplies the most direct analogue for inscripturation—God speaking to his people in human words. In both Old and New Covenants God speaks with an absolute and incontestable authority. But only in the New Covenant is that speech mediated by an incarnate Son, and this point helps us see the way Christology drives the eschatology of Hebrews, to which I want to turn briefly.

- (5) Note some further qualifications that attach particularly now to the speech of God in the Son (v. 2)
- (a) God's speech in his son has taken place "in these last days"
  - (b) What is the writer concerned to communicate? What weight ought to be attached to that prepositional phrase?
  - (c) Further light is shed on this expression in 9:26. ἐπεὶ ἔδει αὐτὸν πολλάκις παθεῖν ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου· νυνὶ δὲ ἅπαξ ἐπὶ συντελείᾳ τῶν αἰώνων εἰς ἀθέτησιν [τῆς] ἁμαρτίας διὰ τῆς θυσίας αὐτοῦ πεφανέρωται. "Otherwise, He would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." (NASB)
    - (i) Here the writer discusses the sacrifice of Christ.
    - (ii) He "has appeared" "once".
    - (iii) The link is clear between here and 1:1. The idea of revelation is controlling. The term of "manifestation" or disclosure of God's revelation.
    - (iv) This revelation in the Son has taken place at the "end" of the ages. Notice how that contrasts temporally: end of the age in contrast from the foundation of the world. This provides a broad historical outlook of the sacrifice of Christ.
    - (v) 9:26 shows us that the author's thinking is moving within the framework of the two-aeon construct.
    - (vi) The basic eschatological structure (schema) is taken over by the writers of the NT and put into service in developing their eschatological outlook. This shows us then that the writer of Hebrews in his

basic outlook is on the same wavelength with Paul and Jesus, who similarly developed the two-aeon construct.

- (vii) The so-called “division point” between the two ages can be seen both as having already arrived and still being in the future.
  - (a) According to the author of Hebrews, the end of the age has already come.
  - (b) Matthew 28:20 shows the end of the age is future.
  - (c) Hence, the ‘already-not yet’ structure that characterizes the outlook of the NT. The writer of Hebrews participates in that construct.
  - (d) In other words, the writer of Hebrews enunciates a “realized eschatology” (1:2 and 9:26).
- (d) [Side observation: We are looking at a document in the latter part of the canon. This same eschatological observation is found in the later part of the canon elsewhere.
  - (i) Some say that the latter part of the canon differs from the eschatological perspective of Paul and Jesus. Not so.
  - (ii) Heb. 1:2; 9:26
  - (iii) James 5:8 “last days”
  - (iv) 1 Peter 1:20 “manifested in these last times”
  - (v) 2 Peter 3:3 “the last days”
  - (vi) 1 John 2:18 “last hour”
  - (vii) Jude 18 “last time”
  - (viii) The distinctiveness of each of these documents is important. But there is a basic eschatological orientation provided by the two-aeon construct, and the

various language that it gives rise to, that is a constant in the NT.

- (ix) Also, the writer of Hebrews more clearly than any other writer in the NT, makes a distinction between the old covenant and the new covenant. That distinction is very pivotal and pervasive in the great central section of the book (chapter 8, especially).
- (x) How then do we relate the distinction between old and new covenant with old and new aeon? The distinction between the covenants **parallels** the aeon distinction. The new covenant and the new age are coterminous. Here again 9:26 is particularly helpful. The death of Christ takes place at the end of the old and the dawning of the new.
- (xi) The old aeon is more extensive than the old covenant (the old aeon stretches to the “foundation of the world”); but the old covenant as the writer of Hebrews puts *it is the order inaugurated under Moses*.

c) God’s speech in the Son:

- (1) God has spoken in the Son *to us!!* It is to the readers and it will become clear that the “us” is any new covenant reader.
- (2) What the writer wants us to appreciate, is that the eschatological revelation of God in Christ is given a *personal reference*. It is directed to the readers and all that they bring to their reading.
- (3) That final eschatological revelation is directed to the readers!
- (4) Notice that happens in a way which again enforces the writer’s historical perspective. The “us” stands in contrast to the “fathers”. That contrast will be picked up in chapter 11. The writer is contrasting the new covenant “us” with the old covenant “fathers.”

- d) The opening words of Hebrews confront us directly with this fact: the fact of the revelation of God in his Son
- (1) What is brought into view in 1:2 is the Son in his prophetic office, the Son as apostle (cf. 3:1). Jesus is the “high priest and apostle” of our confession.
  - (2) All dimensions of prophet, priest and king are here in Hebrews; this is not a contrived distinction forced on the Biblical text.
  - (3) The writer draws attention to two related factors:
    - (a) First factor: on the Christological axis is that the readers are living in times in which the final revelation of God in Christ has taken place. This is *their* time of Christ’s eschatological triumph.
      - (i) The revelation is in a historical perspective. The revelation in the Son is the final revelation, the “last days” revelation. It is a matter of God’s eschatological revelation in contrast to what took place over long centuries through the prophets.
      - (ii) This eschatological revelation is brought to bear on the circumstances of the readers. The writer wants them to know from the beginning that the eschatological situation inaugurated by the coming of Christ is *their* situation.
      - (iii) Cf. 8:1 which uses Psalm 110:1—present time is when Christ is *seated* at the right hand of the majesty in the heavens
      - (iv) Cf. 2:9 which uses Psalm 8—present time is when Christ is crowned with glory and honor.
      - (v) ***This emphasis on the present eschatological kingship of Christ is a sustained emphasis.***

Second factor: the hortatory element. This is equally sustained and pervasive in the document. (See point #2 below)