

HEBREWS—HANDOUT 20

Hebrews 11

Structure:

Transitional Parallelism (or _____)

10:39

11:1

- a. Post-positive particle
- b. Location of negatives
- c. Sequence

Inclusio

Anaphora

Transitional Parallelism (_____)

11:39

12:1

Facets of Faith:

Forensical aspect

Mystical aspect

Fiducial aspect

_____ aspect

Geerhardus Vos, *Sermon on Hebrews 12:1-3*

“. . . that not so much faith in its general sense, but specifically faith in its eschatological bearings—that faith which puts one in vital contact with and impels one irresistibly forward towards the unseen realities of the heavenly world. . . This is naught else but the power of the spiritual, heavenly world itself to which through faith he has access. Although in one sense the inheritance of this world lies yet in the future, yet in another sense it has already begun to be in principle realized and become ours in actual possession. The two spheres of the earthly and the heavenly life do not lie one above the other without touching at any point; heaven with its gifts and powers and joys descends into our earthly experience like the headlands of a great and marvelous continent projecting into the ocean.”

(<http://www.kerux.com/documents/KeruxV01N1A1.asp>)

Faith is a gift of _____

Writer's Method:

Sequence:

Why?

Eschatological aspect as horizontal and vertical.

Eras of OT History of Redemption

v. 3—*creatio ex nihilo*

_____ precedes _____
_____ Creation → _____ Creation
_____ Fallen Creation → _____ Creation
Genesis → Terminus (or: Genesis → Seisosis, cf. Heb. 12:26 [Grk.]

v. 4—east of Eden (bracket: Gen. 3:24 with 4:16)

_____ Lamb → _____ Lamb

Chiastic Homoiototon in Hebrews 10:39 and 11:1

James T. Dennison, Jr.

The writer of the epistle to the Hebrews has been universally designated a master of the Greek language—including rhetorical and literary devices sprinkled throughout his scintillating letter. In particular, one of his¹ favorite literary devices is transitional parallelism, more popularly labeled ‘hook words’. The French expression for this device is *les mots crochets* (“the crocheted words”). The author concatenates sections of his letter by ‘crocheting’ units or pericopes together so that the transitions to the subsequent unfolding of his argument are linked or ‘hooked’ together². This fascinating paradigm is not only a testimony to his skill, it weaves successive units of his letter into a seamless garment.

The unifying motif of his epistolary narrative is the pilgrimage of the people of God from the city of man (world of earth) to the city of God (world of heaven). Christ himself is the Pioneer and Perfecter (12:2) of that sojourn which our author addresses to the “Hebrews” of the end of the age.³ We note that our author places the pilgrim paradigm at the narrative heart of his letter: the OT protological Hebrews or sojourners in relation to the NT Eschatological Sojourner. And all true Christians⁴ are semi-eschatological sojourners and pilgrims (“Hebrews”) in Christ.

At the transition between chapter 10 and chapter 11, our author moves from a consideration of the priestly or sacrificial⁵ work of Christ (4:14-10:19⁶) to the “blessed possessors”⁷ of the former OT era—the so-called “cloud of witnesses” who compose the vanguard of the “Hebrews”. These join the general-assembly church at the end of pilgrim days in the heavenly Jerusalem (where Christ, *the Pilgrim*, sits at the Father’s right hand—1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2, 22). As that priesthood of Christ is heaven-oriented (an eschatological priesthood), so the pilgrims of old (as well as the strangers and aliens of the present) were/are heaven-oriented (an eschatological sojourn, 11:10, 16). The argument will climax with this celestial-homeland motif in 12:22 and

¹ As indicated by the masculine gender reflexive participle in 11:32 (“time would fail me [masculine] recounting”).

² Notice this pattern in the Greek text at: 4:16/5:1 (“receive/appointed” [NASB; but the Greek roots are identical]); 6:20/7:1 (“Melchizedek”); 7:28/8:1 (“high priests/high priest”); 8:13/9:1 (“first”); 9:28/10:1 (“offered/offer”); 10:39/11:1 (“faith”); 11:39/12:1 (“witnessed” [NASB reads “gained approval,” but compare the Greek roots]/“witnesses”). The significance of these transitions are diagramed and discussed in the author’s audio lectures on the entire epistle to the Hebrews, available at nwts.edu and via Podcast, etc. Lectures and downloads are available without charge.

³ Cf. James T. Dennison, Jr., “‘To the Hebrews’: A Narrative Paradigm.” *Kerux: The Journal of Northwest Theological Seminary* 26/2 (September 2011): 30-33. This paradigm forms the cohesive focus of the author’s audio lectures on the whole letter as noted in note 2 above.

⁴ Those with a “sincere” (Greek, ἀληθινῆς, “true”) heart of faith (10:22) are banded together with genuine believers (“by faith”) of the OT era (cf. esp. Heb. 11).

⁵ The use of tabernacle imagery in this section underscores the narrative sojourn motif of the entire letter—a sojourning tabernacle is suited to a sojourning people. The Lord God accommodates himself culturally to the itinerative story of his people.

⁶ Several commentators have noticed the framing device which brackets 4:14 through 10:19/21.

⁷ A phrase commonly used by Cornelius Van Til.

13:14, but it is the undergirding narrative and literary thesis of this epistle—“to the pilgrim ‘Hebrews’ of these ‘last days’ (1:2)”.

In order to weave together the transition from heavenly priesthood to heavenly possession (with illustrations from the OT era), the author uses homoiototon (ὁμοιόπτωτον) in 10:39 and 11:1.⁸ Homoiototon is a literary or rhetorical technique in which similar case endings are repeated in series. The easiest example is the Latin declaration of Julius Caesar: “Veni, vidi, vici.” This example also has the virtue of being alliterative, hence doubly rhetorical (initial and terminal alliterative homoiototon). In the Greek text below, the reader will note the similar case endings patterned ς to ν in 10:39 and ν to ς in 11:1. The reverse parallelism of the endings is also rhetorically (if not theologically) significant.

(10:39) ἡμεῖς δὲ οὐκ ἐσμέν ὑποστολῆς εἰς ἀπώλειαν ἀλλὰ πίστεως εἰς περιποίησιν ψυχῆς.

(11:1) Ἐστὶν δὲ πίστις ἐλπίζομένων ὑπόστασις, πραγμάτων ἐλεγχος οὐ βλεπομένων.

The sequence may be graphed as follows.

For 10:39:

ς
 ν
 ς
 ς ν
 ς
 ς
 ν
 ς

For 11:1:

ν
 ς
 ν
 ς
 ν
 ς
 ν

Not only is there homoiototon here in both verses, the sequence is chiasmic. Each verse begins and ends with a word that has the same case ending (as it were, an inclusio around the verse). But the hinge of the chiasm in each case is the alternate homoiototon case ending (as it were, featuring the turning point of the chiasm). This is indeed a remarkable literary and rhetorical

⁸ Michael R. Cosby demonstrated the use of this device in Heb. 11:33-34, 37 in his monograph *The Rhetorical Composition and Function of Hebrews 11* (1988) 82. However, he does not appear to have detected it in the transitional parallelism between chapter 10 and chapter 11.

achievement. And yet, we have not exhausted the genius of our author in merely observing the chiasmic symmetry of endings.

Observe the post-positive particle δε, positionally and symmetrically placed. In addition, both verses contain the negative particle (οὐκ/οὐ). Note that it occurs near the beginning of verse 39, while it occurs near the end of 11:1—again, a symmetrical pattern enclosing the beginning and end of this transitional concatenation. Furthermore, the initial negative (v. 39) is followed by a positive assertion; the concluding negative (v. 1) is preceded by a positive assertion. The balance places the antithesis over against the thesis (“not” shrinking back to destruction, but the soul’s possessing the substance of things hoped for by faith, which possession places one in contact with the “not”-visible, eternal world of heaven—certainly antithetical to the arena of “destruction”). In addition, the “p” sound (π) is found five times in each verse—more symmetry. The υποστ- stem is duplicated in each verse, as is the πιστ- stem. There is also a duplication of the εσ- stem. In all, our author has crafted a magnificent assertion epexegetical of the symmetry in the soul’s possession⁹ and the soul’s expectation. The transition links possession to the eschatological realities (substantial hope and invisible things). The believer’s soul partakes of the opposite of destruction because faith brings the future and invisible reality hoped for (namely, the world of heaven) into it. By faith, the heavenly benefits of the finished sacrificial work of Christ become a “blessed possession” of the soul transformed by that divine and supernatural gift.

The present possession of future eschatological realities through faith is the principal point of the roll call of the “Hebrews” from the former era. Our author explicitly (and epexegetically) describes his *modus operandi* in 11:13-16. Notice the antithesis which frames this aside. In fact, this unit is the author’s commentary on the entire narrative of his epistle: believers in all ages (Old and New Testament alike) are sojourners and strangers “in the earth” (ἐπι της γης), while at the same time possessing (by faith) a “heavenly” (ἐπουρανίου, “in the heavens”) homeland (πατρίδα). The antipodes of the επ- contrast is itself existential—all believers in the Lord God and his con-substantial (ὑποστάσεως, 1:3) Son, Jesus Christ, are journeying between earth and heaven. In fact, they possess the one and the other: the former in retrospect, the latter in prospect. This “now”/“not yet” paradigm is indicative of NT eschatology throughout the corpus of the revelatory canon of “these last days”. But our author projects it back to the OT era as indicative of the eschatology of every era in the history of redemption. This is not to blur the distinction between the former and the latter age; rather, it is to seamlessly gather up the transforming or regenerating grace of God in both ages under the theme of saving faith or eschatological faith. That is to say, true, sincere, saving faith in every era is eschatological in character—it places the believing pilgrim (“Hebrew”) in possession of the substantial glories of heaven through the perceptive evidence that the invisible Triune God is the central reality of all human existence. Faith, eschatologically construed, brings Abel and Enoch and Abraham and Moses and David

⁹ We follow the NASB margin here for περιποίησιν. At every place in the NT where this noun appears, it retains the sense of “possessing” or “possession” (cf. the Latin *acquisitio*): God’s elect as his “possession” by redemption (Eph. 1:14); the eschatological destiny is not wrath, but the “possession” of salvation through Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 5:9); the effectual call of the gospel is unto the “possession” of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thess. 2:14); people of God’s own “possession” (1 Pet. 2:9).

and NT Christians into possession of the heavenly city where God himself dwells (11:10, 16; 12:22; 13:14); and it does so semi-eschatologically—“now” and “not yet”.¹⁰

Thus, the function of our author’s brilliant chiasmic homoiopiton in 10:39 and 11:1 is to hook together the narrative thread of his letter, unfolding the drama of the heavenly priesthood of Christ (“now” anchored in his crucifixion; “not yet” manifest in his heavenly-tabernacle intercession) and the drama of the heavenly pilgrims of these eschatological days (ἐσχάτου των ἡμερων, 1:2). The perfect symmetry in his construction of this narrative, literary and rhetorical transition is the mirror reflection of the great high priest himself in the pilgrims of every age who, by faith, have possessed him in all his rich glory and all-sufficiency (NB: the eschatological thrust of the author’s repeated use of ἀπαξ [9:26, 28; 12:26, 27] and ἐφάπαξ [7:27; 9:12; 10:10]). What would possess the soul of earthly pilgrims more substantially than the once-for-all sacrifice, death, resurrection and intercession of the Son of God. And what would possess the soul of earthly pilgrims more evidentially than the once-for-all arrival at journey’s end—where Jesus sits, at the right hand of his Father’s glory, in a city populated by Noah and Sarah and Jacob and Joseph and Rahab and Samson and the “blessed possessors” of every age from the foundation of the world.

You pilgrims of this age have been folded into the Eschatological Pilgrim (Jesus Christ) and your story has been woven into his story—the story of an eschatological high priest—an eschatological tabernacle—an eschatological city—an eschatological pilgrimage. An old, old story which you possess, by faith, both now and forevermore. The author of Hebrews has chiasmatically mirrored you in *the Priest* and *the Pilgrim*. Your transition from this world to the next is reflected in the general assembly of the pilgrims of every age, together with whom you are perfected, even as your heavenly Pilgrim Priest has perfected sacrifice, sojourn and session. “To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen!”

¹⁰ It does so also by bringing all believing OT and NT pilgrims into possession of the finished atoning work of Christ—by anticipation (OT types and shadows) or by realization (NT antitypes and reality).