Hebrews and the End of the Exodus*

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Abstract
This paper argues that the letter to the Hebrews renarrates Israel's history as an extended exodus which comes to an end as a result of Christ's high priesthood. According to the author, the promise of rest in Psalm 95 demonstrates that Joshua was unable to lead Israel into God's promised rest. Based on this exegetical key, the author rereads Israel's history, from Abraham up until the present day, as an extension of Israel's wilderness period. Nonetheless, the letter encourages its readers by narrating them into this period at the doorstep of the land of rest.

Keywords
Hebrews, exodus, wilderness

I. Introduction
Forty years ago O.H. Steck argued that the theme of the continuing exile of God's people and the expectation for Israel's full restoration were ubiquitous in the literature of Second Temple Judaism.1 This thesis has been taken up anew in recent years with the hope that it would be of value in understanding not only early Judaism but also Jesus and early Christianity.2 While these arguments have sustained criticism, there can be no doubt that many Jews,

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1 I am grateful to Richard B. Hays and David M. Moffitt for their comments on an earlier version of this paper.
under the hegemony of either Greek or Roman rulers, believed that their tenuous and incomplete possession of the land fell far short of the promise of a glorious restoration such as was envisioned in Deutero-Isaiah, and cried out in words that echoed Ezra’s prayer: “We are slaves today in the land you gave to our ancestors” (Neh. 9:36-37). That is to say, many believed that Israel's history remained frozen in the period of exile. The hope that God would fulfill his promises of old and restore glory to national Israel should be considered a dominant current of thought during the Second Temple period that must have played some role in shaping the thinking of early followers of Jesus.³

In contrast to this trend of dealing with the continuing subjugation of God’s people to foreign nations by narrating Israel’s current history as an extension of the exile, the epistle to the Hebrews proposes a very different renarration of Israel’s history. The purpose of this paper is to examine Hebrews to determine in which period of Israel’s history the author believed himself and his readers to be living.⁴ It will be determined that, analogously to the historical schema outlined above, the author of Hebrews believed that the promises of God had not yet fully been obtained,⁵ though, in a unique move, he does not place himself and his readers in the time of exile but even further back in Israel’s history, into the time of the exodus and wilderness wandering.⁶ According to the author, Israel has been brought out of Egypt but has never, even up until his own day, entered into the land that God had

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⁴ Despite arguments in support of the possibility of female authorship by A. von Harnack, “Probabilia über die Adresse und den Verfasser des Hebräerbriefes,” ZNW 1 (1900) 16-41, and R. Hoppin, Priscilla, Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews and Other Essays (New York: Exposition, 1969) 13-116, I use the masculine for the anonymous author, not merely for convenience but also because the author’s use of a masculine participle (διηγούμενον) in reference to himself points to male authorship (Heb. 11:32).

⁵ G.W. Buchanan, To the Hebrews: Translation, Comment and Conclusions (AB 36; New York: Doubleday, 1972) 74, suggests that the author wrote in a time punctuated by a desire to overthrow Rome and entertained similar hopes.

⁶ Thus, my argument adds specificity to the suggestion of E. Käsemann, The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews (trans. R.A. Harrisville and I.L. Sandberg; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984) 24, that “the motif of the wandering people of God forms the hidden basis of Hebrews.” The motif is not merely that God’s people are wandering, but that they have been wandering in the wilderness ever since God first brought them out of Egypt. The same can be said for W.G. Johnsson, “The Pilgrimage Motif in the Book of
promised them. This is significantly different than the suggestion of some commentators that the exodus generation serves merely as a rhetorical or typological example for the readers of the letter.7 Throughout the letter, the author demonstrates that the land of promise was never actually possessed but only ever sojourned in, and thus all of Israel’s history subsequent to the exodus belongs to the period of the wilderness wanderings. Such a radical re-reading and reconfiguration of Israel’s history is demonstrated by the explication of Psalm 95 in Hebrews 3-4, the retelling of Israel’s history in Heb. 11:1-12:3, and the envisioned end of Israel’s continuing exodus and wilderness wanderings as portrayed in God’s people drawing near to the heavenly Jerusalem (12:22-29).

II. The Remaining Rest (or Continuing Exodus) of Israel

How does the author come to the conclusion that the exodus is continuing since, according to the scriptural account, Israel entered Canaan under the leadership of Joshua, disposessed many of the inhabitants currently occupying the land, and set up its own monarchy that lasted a number of centuries (Joshua-2 Kings)? In fact, Josh. 21:43-45 explicitly contradicts the author’s assertion that the people did not enter the Promised Land of rest:8 “And Hebrews,” JBL 97 (1978) 239-251, who argues for the importance of pilgrimage within the letter but fails to see that the author envisions a specific pilgrimage, namely, the exodus.

7 Cf. K. Schenck, Understanding the Book of Hebrews: The Story behind the Sermon (Louisville: WJKP, 2003) 61-62; H.W. Attridge, The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989) 114. Käsemann, Wandering, 19, suggests: “The existential necessity of wandering for the bearer of the revelation allows Israel, wandering through its wilderness, to appear as antitype of Christianity.” While it is true that Moses’ generation (not Israel as Käsemann suggests) does serve as a negative example for the author’s readers (not Christianity as distinct from Judaism as Käsemann suggests), it is incorrect to distinguish between the two as if only the first was actually in the exodus while the second was not. For an instance where the wilderness generation does function as an example, or in Paul’s words, a τύπος, see 1 Cor. 10:1-11. It is also inaccurate, in light of the author’s assertion that none have actually entered God’s promised rest, to speak of a ‘new exodus’ in Hebrews, as does F.F. Bruce, The Epistle to the Hebrews: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 62-63.

8 P. Ellingworth, The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 254, seems to recognize this but then alleviates the tension by saying that, while Israel did possess the land for generations, this was not the ‘true’ rest. But the tension must persist since the author does not make any distinction such as true versus
YHWH gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their ancestors and they possessed it and they dwelt in it. And YHWH gave them rest (κατέπαυσεν) on every side, according to all that he swore to their ancestors and not one of all their enemies stood before them, YHWH gave all their enemies into their hand. And not one word of all the good words that YHWH spoke to the house of Israel failed; everything came to pass."

Such a positive summary of Israel's entry into the land under the leadership of Joshua is expressed again in Solomon's lengthy dedicatory speech for the temple in Jerusalem: "Blessed is YHWH today, who gave rest (κατάπαυσιν) to his people Israel, according to all that he spoke; not one word has failed of all his good words, which he uttered by Moses his servant" (1 Kgs. 8:56). According to scripture, Joshua succeeded in leading the people into all of God's promises; in other words, "Mission Accomplished!" Nonetheless, the biblical results of the leadership of Joshua find no place in the letter to the Hebrews. Instead, the author provides an alternative reading of Joshua's life, saying εί γαρ αυτούς Ίησούς κατέπαυσ εν, ούκ αν περί αλλής ελάλει μετά ταύτα ἡμέρας (Heb. 4:8). This second-class conditional clause demonstrates that, to the author, the idea that Joshua had given the people rest is contrary to fact. What enables the author to make a move that appears to be in opposition to the biblical account of Israel's history? The answer lies in his understanding of the significance of Psalm 95 (LXX Psalm 94).

false rest; instead, he simply asserts that Joshua did not lead the exodus generation into the promised rest.

9. Unless otherwise stated all translations are my own.

10. Neither Josh. 21:43-45 nor 1 Kgs. 8:56 use the language of ἐπαγγελία, as the author of Hebrews frequently does, but both contain a similar idea, as evidenced by their reference to God's good words.

11. To be sure, even within the book of Joshua we find statements acknowledging the ambiguity of Israel's possession of the land (cf. Josh. 13:1-6).

12. Attridge, Epistle, 130, argues that Ἰησοῦς functions typologically since it could refer either to Joshua or to Jesus. For an instance of this, see Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho 113, which states that Joshua "led the rest of the people into the Holy Land. . . . Joshua gave an inheritance to them for a time only, since he was not Christ our God, nor the Son of God; but Jesus, after the holy resurrection, will give an inheritance to us for eternity" (cf. chap. 132). While Justin develops this typology, it is missing in Hebrews because Joshua does not bring the people into God's rest. As will be discussed below, in this sense he contrasts with Christ who opens the way into this rest.

13. Cf. BDF 360 (4). Thus, Bruce, Epistle, 76, overstates his case: "It is plain (our author implies) that the 'rest' spoken of in Ps. 95:11 is not the earthly Canaan. For that land of rest
Since it was traditionally believed that the Psalms were composed by David, the fact that he could refer to another day when rest might be obtained demonstrates that Joshua did not actually lead them into the rest that was promised to them, yet even more so shows that, up until David’s day, God had not fulfilled his promise to bring his people into his rest. The author uses Psalm 95 to show that Israel never entered into God’s promised rest and that the exodus continued at least until the days of David. If the people remained in the wilderness until David’s days, at what point in Israel’s history could it be said that the exodus ended?

Further, numerous scholars have argued that Psalm 95 was written for use in the liturgical life of early Israel, and the ‘today’ of v. 7 referred to the festival day on which the psalm was sung. That is to say, the psalm was composed in such a way that the prophetic warning contained in vv. 7-11 always referred to the hic et nunc. It is possible that Psalm 95 was used liturgically by the Israelites of the second generation, who entered it under the command of Joshua. Since the author never asserts that the people entered the land, and his artful retelling of Israel’s history in Hebrews 11 represses this moment, ‘rest’ is not necessarily distinct from the land of Canaan.

14 C.R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 36; New York: Doubleday, 2001) 271, states that the “argument of Hebrews depends... on the way the psalmist invites people of later generations—including those of the author’s own time—to hear God’s word.”

15 W.L. Lane, *Hebrews* (2 vols; WBC 47; Dallas: Word, 1991) 1:100-101, and Attridge, *Epistle*, 130, both assume that the author agrees with the scriptural account that Joshua has led people into the Promised Land, but this goes against the letter’s argument.


17 Koester, *Hebrews*, 264, notes: “The LXX enhances the incident’s exemplary quality by translating rather than transliterating the place-names, so that instead of referring to the places of Massah and Meribah, the psalm refers to the ‘rebellion’ and ‘testing’ that characterized the whole wilderness period.” It is quite possible, therefore, that the LXX translator of the Psalter was aware of the liturgical use of Ps. 95 (LXX Ps. 94) and was helping to facilitate this use. Bruce, *Epistle*, 63, points out that Ps. 95 is used in contemporary Judaism to inaugurate the Sabbath, although M.S. Rozenberg and B.M. Zlotowitz, *The Book of Psalms: A New Translation and Commentary* (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1999) 596, trace this practice back only to the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries. M. Nulman, *The Encyclopedia of
in the Second Temple Period, thus enabling the author of Hebrews to take advantage of the ambiguity of the referent of 'today', and apply it to the days of his readers. The author calls his readers to exhort one another while it is called 'today' so that none are hardened by sin after hearing God's voice (Heb. 3:12-13). Similarly, through his emphasis on σήμερον, the author contemporizes the warning of Psalm 95, demonstrating to his readers that they are in danger of hardening their hearts. Because it is 'today', the community members are to exhort (παρακαλείτε) one another so that none fall away from the living God (3:12-13). The fact that it can still be called 'today' means that the exodus never ended and that rest can still be obtained.

The second interpretive move made by the author is to stress the possessive pronoun μου: "I swore that they would never enter my rest" (Heb. 4:5; LXX Ps. 94:11). Though at Sinai God promised Moses that his presence would go before the people and he would give them rest (καταπαύσω—Ex. 33:14), in Psalm 95, this κατάπαυσις is no general rest but God's rest specifically. "So then, there remains a sabbath rest for the people of God; for the one who enters into his [God's] rest also rests from his own works.

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Jewish Prayer: Ashkenazic and Sephardic Rites (Northvale: Jason Aronson, 1993) 224, tracks the institution of this Sabbath practice to the kabbalist Rabbi Moses Cordovero of Safed (1522-1570), but claims it has antecedents in the Talmud.

In addition, Ellingworth, Epistle, 218; P.E. Enns, "The Interpretation of Psalm 95 and Its Interpretation in Hebrews 3.1-4.13," in C.A. Evans and J.A. Sanders (eds.), Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals (JSNTSup 148; Sheffield: SAP, 1997) 352-363, argue that the author changes 'that generation of the LXX to 'this generation' in order to reapply the psalm to his readers.

D. Flusser, "'Today if You will Listen to His Voice': Creative Jewish Exegesis in Hebrews 3-4," in B. Uffenheimer and H.G. Revendlow (eds.), Creative Biblical Exegesis: Christian and Jewish Hermeneutics through the Centuries (JSOTSS 59; Sheffield: JSOT, 1988) 55-62, argues that the linking of 'today with community exhortation is found in halakhic Midrash in the Dead Sea Scrolls, although he notes that there it is never explicitly linked with Psalm 95.

H. Braun, An die Hebräer (HNT 14; Tübingen: Mohr, 1984) 95, and Buchanan, To the Hebrews, 71-72, suggest that the stress on σήμερον also signifies the nearness of the eschaton, although this is disputed by E. Grässer, An die Hebräer (3 vols; EKKNT 17; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990-1997) 1:187 n. 21.

D.A. deSilva, Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 152-153, notes that the "repetitive recontextualization of Psalm 95:11 allows 'entering God's rest' to saturate the hearers' minds, replacing any contrary or competing agendas they may have brought to the hearing of this sermon." Presumably, this repetition would also have functioned to retrain the reader's thinking about the end of exodus as well, since it demonstrates that the wilderness generation did not enter that rest.
just as God rested from his own” (Heb. 4:9-10). Such a carefully delineated rest, God’s rest, must then be further explicated, which the author does by linking, through the Jewish exegetical technique of gezerah shawah, Ps. 95:7 with Gen. 2:2: καὶ θεός κατέπαυσεν τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τῇ ἐβδομῇ ἀπὸ πάντων τῶν ἔργων αὐτοῦ ὃν ἐποίησεν. Thus, the rest promised in Psalm 95 is associated with the primordial rest that God himself entered into after the creation of the world, but where exactly is this rest? Jewish literature provides two possible locations for God’s rest. For instance, Sir. 36:13 says: “Have pity on the city of your sanctuary, Jerusalem, the place of your rest (κατάπαυμα).” While the noun used for ‘rest’ here is similar to that used in Hebrews 3-4, a closer parallel can be found in Ps. 132:13-14: “YHWH has chosen Zion, he has chosen it for his dwelling: ‘This is my resting place (κατάπαυσις) forever, here I will dwell for I have chosen it’.” In Sirach and Psalms then, God’s resting place is expressly identified with Jerusalem. On the other

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22 Attidge, *Epistle*, 126-8, has an excursus on κατάπαυσις that I believe misses the significant fact that it is not rest in general but God’s rest in specific that is to be entered. Thus, texts that describe a general rest might not be the most instructive in helping the reader to determine the author’s intent. Nonetheless, I find his warning, *Epistle*, 128, apropos: “As with other highly evocative symbols used in Hebrews, it is difficult, and perhaps dangerous, to be overly specific about the way in which the text exploits the metaphor of ‘rest.’” The secondary literature on this topic has formed no consensus. Cf. for instance, O. Hofius, *Katapausis: Die Vorstellung vom endzeitlichen Ruheort im Hebräerbrief* (WUNT 11; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1970); H.A. Lombard, “Katapausis in the Letter to the Hebrews,” *Neot* 5 (1971) 60-71; H.W. Attidge, “‘Let us Strive to Enter that Rest’: The Logic of Hebrews 4:1-11,” *HTR* 73 (1980) 279-288.


24 Attidge, *Epistle*, 130 n. 90, points out that this link does not work in the MT since Gen. 2:2 uses הָעַם and קָנָה, while Ps. 95:11 uses לְהָנַךְ, which would explain why Gen. 2:2 and Ps. 95:11 are not linked together in rabbinc literature. Though we do not know how early the liturgical tradition is in Judaism, it is interesting that the *Kabbalat Shabbat* (The Reception of the Sabbath) contains Psalm 95 and the Amida of the Sabbath’s evening service is followed by the recitation of Gen. 2:1-3, thus linking the two texts within later Sabbath liturgy. Cf. R. Posner, U. Kaploun and S. Cohen (eds.), *Jewish Liturgy: Prayer and Synagogue Service Through the Ages* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1975) 130-141.

25 The Greek translates the Hebrew הָנַךְ, which is also found in Ps. 95:11. לְהָנַךְ is found again in Ps. 132:8, although the LXX renders it with ἀνάπαυσιν. It is interesting that the Midrash on Psalm 95, followed by Rashi (see M.I. Gruber, *Rashi’s Commentary on Psalms* [BRLJ 18; Leiden: Brill, 2004] 595-596), interprets God’s resting place in Ps. 95:11 as being
hand, Isa. 66:1 places God's resting place in the heavens: "Thus says the Lord: 'Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool; what is the house which you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest (κατάπαυσις; MT—יִתְנָכָה)?' For Trito-Isaiah, God's rest is in the heavens, and therefore the temple and Jerusalem cannot be the (sole) location of God's resting place. Does Hebrews indicate which of these it envisions in describing God's rest, or does it somehow include both of these concepts?  

This emphasis on God's rest facilitates the author's attempt to show that the promise was never possessed in Israel's history. Despite what the biblical book of Joshua might say, Joshua and the people of Israel did not obtain God's promised rest δι' ἁπίστίαν (3:19). As will be seen, it was not merely this first generation that failed to enter into God's rest; the entire history of Israel can also be read as a failure to enter that rest, albeit not explicitly because of unbelief. It is true that the first generation serves as a warning, but only in as much as the readers themselves are also in the exodus and wandering period. Having set the scriptural foundation for his argument that Israel has never entered into the land of promise, the author will provide a retelling of Israel's history in Hebrews 11 that further demonstrates this point.

III. Israel's History Rewritten: A People Wandering Towards the Promise

The argument of Hebrews 3-4, that the wilderness generation never entered God's rest, is expanded Hebrews 11. While the chapter is a retelling of Israel's...
history, focusing on the πίστις exemplified by numerous Jewish heroes, it also serves to demonstrate the unfulfilled nature of the promise throughout Israel's history. As Attridge notes, Heb. 11:1 does not provide an abstract definition of πίστις, but rather provides "a programmatic remark for the encomium that follows;" faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the proof of things unseen (οù βλεπομένων). As the author's version of Israel's history unfolds, it becomes clear that the things not seen are God's promised rest, that is, his unshakeable city (11:8-15). Simply put, Hebrews 11 recounts Israel's history in such a way that the people of God never receive the land of God's promise. Pamela Michelle Eisenbaum's recent monograph on Hebrews 11 demonstrates convincingly that the chapter is more similar to Jewish lists, with their interest in ancient personages and diachronic history, than Greco-Roman lists, which are more focused on recent historical figures and less diachronic. While she notes the repetition of πίστις throughout the chapter, Eisenbaum argues that the underlying theme is that these individuals are marginalized: "The study of Hebrews 11 in its literary environs leads me to conclude that the heroes of Hebrews share in common a marginalized existence which situates them outside the national destiny of Israel." That is to say, although these figures belonged to historical Israel, the author has portrayed them in such a fashion that they are now distinct and separate from the nation itself. Such a summary of the text, and the letter

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28 The genre of Hebrews 11 has been much disputed: H. Thyen, Der Stil der Judisch-Hellenistischen Homilie (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1955), has argued that it is a retelling of Israel's history; M. Cosby, The Rhetorical Composition and Function of Hebrews 11: In Light of Example Lists in Antiquity (Macon: Mercer, 1988), sees it as an 'Example List,' and C. Spicq, L’Epître aux Hébreux (Sources Bibliques; Paris: J. Gabalda, 1977), argues that it is a combination of rewritten history and an example list.

29 Attridge, Epistle, 308.

30 DeSilva, Perseverance, 383-384, suggests that πίστις should be understood within the context of patronage but, while the two are not mutually exclusive, the context of covenant seems more appropriate given the fact that Israel's history is being recounted.

31 This has a close parallel in 4 Ezra 7:26: "For behold, the time will come, when the signs that I have foretold to you will come to pass, that the city that now is unseen will appear, and the land which now is hidden will be disclosed."


33 Eisenbaum, Jewish Heroes, 3.

34 Eisenbaum, Jewish Heroes, 220, claims that for Hebrews, "Abraham and Moses are not Israelites or Jews, they are Christians" (italics original).
in general, has one far-reaching implication for the place of Hebrews within the literary landscape of the early Church: "Hebrews 11 represents a significant point in the evolution that led from the understanding of Jewish scripture as the ethnic history of the Jews to the theological history of Christians."\textsuperscript{35} Is this true though? Do we have here, in nascent form, the early Christian trend of dissociation from the fate of national Israel and the re-appropriation of Jewish scriptures by Christianity?

The argument of this paper calls such a conclusion into question.\textsuperscript{36} Instead of seeing these examples as separated from national Israel, we should see them as exemplifying the author’s claim that the long history of Israel, up to the present day, belongs to the period of the exodus/wilderness wanderings. The marginalization portrayed in the author’s presentation of these Jewish heroes is not meant to sunder the relationship between them and national Israel, rather it is meant to demonstrate that marginalization is and has always been a sign that one belongs to God’s people.

Abraham, the recipient of God’s promise of an inheritance (κληρονομία) in Gen. 12:1–2, is portrayed as going out from what was known to what was unknown. While κληρονομία is not used in the LXX account of Abraham’s call, it nonetheless occurs in reference to the land throughout the biblical narrative (cf. Gen. 15:7; 22:17; 28:4).\textsuperscript{37} That Abraham is called an alien in the land of God’s promise does not mean that the author is stressing the fact that he is not a real Israelite; instead, the author’s stress on Abraham’s foreign status (παρφόκησεν, ἄλλοτρίαν, σχηματίζεις κατοικήσας) highlights the fact that although Abraham and his sons were promised the land, they never obtained it.\textsuperscript{38} For the author’s argument to work, the lan-

\textsuperscript{35} Eisenbaum, Jewish Heroes, 192.

\textsuperscript{36} One fundamental concern is with the way language is functioning in such a statement. Does the author or his community really distinguish between Jewish and Christian, ethnic history and theological history? If these categories do not exist in his thinking, such a statement will cloud the issue. Further, since Heb. 2:16 presumably refers to the author and his readers as σπέρμα Αβραάμ, how could he be read as unconcerned with Israel’s history? In all fairness to Eisenbaum, she has recently backtracked on such questionable distinctions, cf. “Locating Hebrews within the Literary Landscape of Christian Origins,” in G. Gelardini (ed.), Hebrews: Contemporary Methods—New Insights (BIS 75; Leiden: Brill, 2005) 213-237.

\textsuperscript{37} Lane, Hebrews, 2:349 believes that the author purposefully changed εἰς τὴν γῆν in Gen. 12:1 to εἰς τόπον to make the goal of his wandering more ambiguous.

guage within the biblical accounts that speak of Abraham’s time in the land as a time of sojourning needs to be stressed to demonstrate that he never actually possessed the land but was merely a foreigner there.\footnote{Indeed, the author of Hebrews is only expanding on Gen. 17:8: τὴν γῆν ἦν παροικεῖς. Eisenbaum, Jewish Heroes, 156-7, is correct to note the uniqueness of this stress in comparison with Jewish tradition, yet wrong to conclude that by it the author wants to disconnect Abraham from Israel. As Lane, Hebrews, 2:350, states: “The description of pilgrimage in ἀπεθανον οὖτοι πάντες, μὴ λαβόντες τὰς ἐπαγγελίας), acknowledging that they were but “strangers and exiles in the land” (ξένοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι εἰσίν εἰπὶ τῆς γῆς). This acknowledgment demonstrates that they were still in search of their homeland.}

Then, in verse 13, the author argues that all these died without having received the promise (ἀπέθανον οὖτοι πάντες, μὴ λαβόντες τὰς ἐπαγγελίας), acknowledging that they were but “strangers and exiles in the land” (ξένοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι εἰσίν εἰπὶ τῆς γῆς).\footnote{The description of this unnamed city parallels biblical descriptions of Jerusalem. Cf. Ps. 48:8 (LXX Ps. 47:9); 87:1-3, 5 (LXX Ps. 86:1-3, 5); 121:3 (LXX Ps. 122:3); Isa. 14:32; 33:20. If the readers have any doubts about the identity of this city, the author will clearly identify it with Mount Zion, the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22). As noted above, it is possible that this city was already alluded to in Heb. 11:1, where the author defines πίστις as the evidence of things unseen (οὐ βλεπομένων). According to 4 Ezra 7:26-30, there is an unseen city and unseen land that will be revealed in the days of the Messiah, a city which, according to Hebrews, Abraham only sees from afar.}

Despite his alien status, Abraham’s eyes were on a city with foundations (by way of contrast to the tents he dwelt in) that was built by God (v. 10).\footnote{RSV, Koester, Hebrews, 484, Attridge, Epistle, 330, all translate ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς as ‘on the earth.’ Attridge, Epistle, 330, compares it to Greek traditions of the soul in exile in the world. Neither Koester nor Attridge discuss the possibility that the alternative meaning for γῆ (‘land’) is being employed here. Lane, Hebrews, 2:346, and Buchanan, To the Hebrews, 178, argue that it does mean ‘land’ and refers to the land of Canaan. The latter possibility is to be preferred here because it accords with the previous use of γῆ in v. 9 where it means the land of Canaan. Further, it is possible that Abraham’s words to the Canaanites in Gen. 23:4 (παροικὸς καὶ παρεπίδημος ἐγώ εἰμι μεθ’ ὑμῶν) are being alluded to, thus demonstrating that Canaan is the referent of γῆ. The purpose of the passage is to demonstrate that even though at various times, Israelites were in the land of Canaan, they still did not obtain the promise that God had given them.}

The author’s description of Joseph also fits this pattern (11:22). Why, of all the deeds Joseph is well known for, does the author focus on his request that his bones be brought out of Egypt? If the author were concerned with demonstrating that Joseph was an example of someone alienated from the Sheffield: SAP, 1993) 44-64, esp. 62, states that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob resided in the land but that their “confidence was not in what they possessed.” This goes further than the author of Hebrews who clearly states that they did not possess it but merely lived as foreigners in the land.

The purpose of the passage is to demonstrate that even though at various times, Israelites were in the land of Canaan, they still did not obtain the promise that God had given them.
nation of Israel, it would make more sense to mention his faith in response to being sold by and separated from the rest of Israel. Instead, the hope of the exodus points to the hope Joseph had regarding God's promise that his people would enter the land of promise.\(^{42}\) Joseph's request that his bones be brought from Egypt to the land of Canaan demonstrates that his imminent death did not cause him to give up hope in God's promise.\(^{43}\)

Further, Eisenbaum has a difficult time explaining how Moses' alienation from his Egyptian family provides an example of his alienation from his people.\(^{44}\) In direct contrast to her understanding, the author of Hebrews stresses how Moses gives up the comforts of Egypt so that he can identify himself with the people of God. Unity with, not marginalization and separation from, the nation of Israel is the stress of the passage.\(^{45}\) Then in his leadership of Israel, his action of instituting Passover is what preserves the people from the Destroyer (11:28), and becomes the critical event in God's redemption of his people from slavery in Egypt.\(^{46}\) Instead of focusing on Moses leading the people across the Red Sea, the author expands his discussion of history to the entire nation (note the third person plural, rather than singular, \(πίστει διέβησαν\)),\(^{47}\) again, demonstrating his concern for the nation of Israel, not merely faithful individuals removed from their roles within corporate Israel's history.

This interpretation of Hebrews 11 as a retelling of Israel's history as a continuing exodus also provides a better understanding of the ending of the list. Why does the author shorten his treatment of the heroes right at

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\(^{42}\) Koester, *Hebrews*, 493, argues that the author's use of \(ἐμνήμονευσεν\) about the exodus, which has yet to occur, points to the fact that Joseph remembered God's promise to provide his people with a land of rest.

\(^{43}\) Lane, *Hebrews*, 366. Further, Koester, *Hebrews*, 494, suggests that "Joseph's bones help to foreshadow the final rest of the faithful."

\(^{44}\) Eisenbaum, *Jewish Heroes*, 168.

\(^{45}\) Attridge, *Epistle*, 340, notes that while 'people of God' \((τὸ λαὸς τοῦ θεοῦ)\) is used here instead of 'Israel,' throughout the letter \(λαὸς\) refers to the people of God under the old covenant, that is, Israel (cf. 2:17; 5:3; 7:5, 11, 27; 9:7, 19).

\(^{46}\) I do not understand how Eisenbaum, *Jewish Heroes*, 170, can assert, "[E]mphasis on Moses' personality, however, deflates Moses' role as a savior of the people of Israel." It is true that no mention is made of his leading them out of Egypt, but that he redeemed them from the Destroyer demonstrates his role as saviour of the nation.

\(^{47}\) *Mekhila de-Rabbi Ishmael*, Beshallah 4, also stresses the people's faith in crossing the Red Sea. As Lane, *Hebrews*, 2:377, states: "The action of the people in crossing the sea indicates that they shared the faith of Moses."
the moment when the land is traditionally believed to be possessed? According to Eisenbaum: "The disorganized chronology combined with the listing of several mediocre names is an allusion to what our author sees as the dissolution of biblical history."48 But, given our understanding, the questionable inclusion (and exclusion) of historical figures and loss of chronology at the exact moment when, according to Scripture, Israel entered into the Promised Land, point in quite another direction. In light of the author's argument in Hebrews 3-4 that Joshua did not provide the promised rest for the people, and that Israel still exists in the exodus period, it is understandable why the author seems to lose interest in history after the walls of Jericho fall.49 Rahab, on the other hand, receives explicit mention because of her hospitality shown to the Israelite spies.50 Were the author to attempt to describe the faith of later heroes, he would have had to contend with the difficulty that the stories assume the possession (or past possession) of the Promised Land. The theme of the continuing exodus of Israel in Hebrews also explains the puzzling absence of Joshua from the list of heroes.51 Since the author has already stated that Joshua did not lead the people into the promised rest, how could he then use him as an example of faith? Further, chronology ceases to be a matter of concern because time has, in effect, been frozen so that no matter what a hero does, Israel's story is still stuck in the time of the exodus/wilderness wanderings. Despite the fact that these heroes, by faith, conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, extinguished the power of fire, escaped the edges of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, routed foreign camps, and received their dead by resurrection (vv. 33-35a), the one

48 Eisenbaum, Jewish Heroes, 175.
49 Johnsson, "The Pilgrimage Motif," 241, rightly states that "ideas implied and inchoate in 3:6b-4:11 reach explicit expression in chap. 11." The statement that Joshua does not give the people rest is here explicated, demonstrating the people of Israel are still in search of God's promised rest.
50 Lane, Hebrews, 2:379, helpfully suggests that Rahab is mentioned because she clearly believed that God's promise of the land would obtain at the moment when Israel itself doubted and disobeyed God (Josh. 2:9-11).
51 Eisenbaum, Jewish Heroes, 172, states: "The absence of Joshua in chap. 11 is especially glaring" but believes that this is due to him being "a national hero." Interestingly, L.H. Feldman, "Philo's Interpretation of Joshua," JSP 12 (2001) 165-178, argues that Philo also vitiates the personality and role of Joshua in De Vita Mosis, albeit with the intention of stressing the role that Moses played in Israel's history.
abiding fact is that Israel was still in the exodus. The author concludes his list by summarizing: “All these, though attested through faith, did not receive the promise” (v. 39). In keeping with the implication that he draws from Psalm 95, the author retells Israel’s history as a people, who by faith live in a way that demonstrates that the yet-to-be-realized rest can still be obtained.

Joshua’s absence from the recounting of Israel’s history in Hebrews 11 is remedied in the first verses of Hebrews 12. Here another Joshua, also an ἀρχηγός, is portrayed as an exemplar of faith, who, through suffering, wins the promise of God (4:14). Unlike the Jesus of Jewish scriptures, this Jesus is not only an ἀρχηγός, but is also a τελειωτής, of the faith exemplified by Israel’s heroes in Hebrews 11. The meaning of the uncommon christological title, ἀρχηγός (cf. Acts 3:15; 5:31; Heb. 2:10), has undergone considerable scrutiny, though whatever meanings were readily available to readers of the text, it seems that the word refers most naturally, given the narrative context of the exodus, to the leaders of Israel in the wilderness. In Num. 13:2-3 Moses sends out twelve ἀρχηγοί who come back with an ill report about the land and convince the people to fall back from entering into God’s promised land of rest. In response, the people actually cry out for a new ἀρχηγός, one who will lead them back to Egypt. Then, during the 40-year period, the ἀρχηγοί again appear, this time in the company of Korah (Num. 16:1-3), only to rebel against God and Moses. Finally, the ἀρχηγοί are blamed for the fact that the people are marrying Moabite women and are to be hung on a gibbet for it (Num. 25:1-5). The example of these leaders to the nation during the time of the exodus was less than ideal. True, two ἀρχηγοί, Joshua and Caleb, were faithful and as a result God promised to give them entrance into the land, but the author of Hebrews silences these biblical accounts in his retelling of Israel’s history.

52 Koester, Hebrews, 517 n. 421, wrongly states: “The rapid listing of examples of conflict, heroism, and suffering shows that there was no rest after entry into the land”; rather, this rapid listing demonstrates that God’s people never possessed the land.

53 Käsemann, Wanderung, 23, evocatively depicts Hebrews 11 as “the ‘cloud of witnesses’ whose activity is decisively and continually described as a wandering toward the city of God.”

54 As Koester, Hebrews, 523, and N.C. Croy, Endurance in Suffering: Hebrews 12:1-13 in Its Rhetorical, Religious, and Philosophical Context (SNTSMS 98; Cambridge: CUP, 1998) 175-176, note, it is precisely in this sense that Jesus, as a model of faith, differs from those heroes of Hebrews 11.

The first ἀρχηγός, Joshua, has already been described as failing to lead God's people into the land of rest; it is thus up to the second ἀρχηγός, Jesus, to lead the people out of their wanderings and into God's rest. According to the author of Hebrews, Jesus does this through his death on the cross, resurrection, and subsequent cleansing of both the heavenly sanctuary and the people's consciences by his own blood (Heb. 9:12-14).\textsuperscript{56} Having dealt, by his blood, with the transgressions of the first covenant that hindered God's people from receiving their inheritance, Jesus becomes a mediator of a new covenant, opening up the way for God's people to enter into God's rest (9:15). As a result of the priestly work of Christ, which the author discusses at length in Heb. 6:19-10:18, Christ is enthroned as king, and now awaits the complete subjugation of his enemies (Heb. 1:3-13; 2:5-10; 10:12; 12:2).\textsuperscript{57} Yet, if Christ has been crowned king and has restarted Israel's stalled history, why have the author's readers not experienced this new reality?\textsuperscript{58}

IV. The Heavenly Jerusalem

Hebrews 12 ends with imagery that again situates the readers in the wilderness, placing them beyond Sinai (vv. 18-21) and at the border of the land of promise (vv. 22-24).\textsuperscript{59} It is not surprising that the rhetorical climax of the

\textsuperscript{56} While this paper has not examined Hebrews' discussion of the high priesthood of Jesus, it is significant that the comparison of Jesus' sacrifice with those of the levitical system centers around the cult of the tabernacle, not on the Temple in Jerusalem. This further substantiates the claim of this paper that the author suppresses the biblical account of entry into the land in his attempt to argue for Israel's continuing exodus. How could the author talk about continuing exodus if he has compared Christ's sacrifice to what took place in the Jerusalem Temple?


\textsuperscript{58} This disappointment and disillusionment of the readers must be taken seriously. If an already/not-yet tension exists in Hebrews, it leans heavily on the side of not-yet, contrary to K.-K. Yeo, "The Meaning and Usage of the Theology of 'Rest' (katapausis and sabbatismos) in Hebrews 3:7-4:13," \textit{AJT} 5 (1991) 2-33, who argues that the readers can already enter into the promised rest.

\textsuperscript{59} As Koester, Hebrews, 544, notes, the Greek word προσελήνυθητε here signifies that they have 'drawn near' not that they have entered into Zion, as D. Peterson, Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the Epistle to the Hebrews (SNTSMS 47; Cambridge: CUP, 1982) 160, suggests, nor that they "enjoy the objective blessings of the new covenant already in this life," as suggested by Lane, Hebrews, 2:471. Against this interpretation, if they had entered into the rest, there would be no reason for the author to be concerned that they might fall back in unbelief. In addition, in Heb. 13:14 the author says that he and his readers are awaiting the city that is to come, stressing that they have not entered this rest.
letter discusses the climax of Israel’s history: entrance into Zion. While the author does not here employ the language of entering God’s κατάπαυσις, titles such as “Zion,” “the city of God,” and “the heavenly Jerusalem,” connote the same idea, as evidenced by biblical and non-biblical passages that equate Zion with the location of God’s rest (cf. Ps. 132:13-14; Sir. 36:13; 4 Ezra 8:52). The importance of this city motif is illuminated by Josephus’ discussion of the wilderness generation, who were not able to enter into the land as a result of ἀκρασία (Ant. 3.314), and would therefore be homeless (ἀνέστιους) and citiless (ἀπόλιδας) for forty years in the wilderness (3.314).

In response to this, the people cry out that God will “free them from wandering in the wilderness, and provide cities (πόλεις) for them” (3.315). Thus, Josephus’ wilderness generation is a people in search of a city. This is exactly what the author of Hebrews has said Abraham and his descendents were in search of (11:10, 13, 16), and in Heb. 12:22 the readers are portrayed as those who are about to obtain it. The reference to the ‘heavenly Jerusalem’ indicates that this is not merely the physical Jerusalem of Jewish scriptures, but something more. It is a city that will withstand the eschatological shaking that God has in store for both heaven and earth (12:27-28).

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61 Lane, Hebrews, 2:466, is correct to note that these titles evoke thought of the heavenly sanctuary (although incorrect to mention a heavenly Temple since the word never occurs in the letter!), as is supported by the fact that the author also says that his readers have drawn near to the sprinkled blood of Jesus (12:24), which the author has already placed in the heavenly sanctuary (9:11-12).
62 The people cry out for cities in Ant. 3.315; thus L.H. Feldman’s translation, Judean Antiquities 1-4: Translation and Commentary (FJTC 3; Leiden: Brill, 2000), of ἀπόλις as ‘without country’ seems to obscure the connection.
63 Translation of Feldman, Judean Antiquities, 327.
64 As mentioned above, 4 Ezra 13:35-36 clearly indicates that the eschatological Zion and the ‘historical’ Zion are not mutually exclusive: “But he [the Messiah] shall stand on the top of Mount Zion. And Zion will come and be made manifest to all people, prepared and built, as you saw the mountain carved out without hands.” Thus Buchanan’s claim, To the Hebrews, 63-65, that the promised rest means the land of Canaan, is not “ganz abwegig” as W.R.G. Loader claims in his Sohn und Hoherpriester: Eine traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zur Christologie des Hebraerbriefes (WMANT 53; Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1981) 52.
65 J.W. Thompson, “‘That Which Cannot be Shaken’: Some Metaphysical Assumptions in Heb 12:27,” JBL 94 (1975) 580-587, is right to note that the author has taken up eschatological raditions that were based on Hag. 2:6 but wrong to argue that the author is distinguishing between Israel and the Church. Instead, the author contrasts the first wilderness generation with what he likely takes to be the last wilderness generation.
The author, having narrated his readers into the point of the story where Israel is about to enter into God's promised rest, begins the peroration with one final warning: “Let us worship God properly with reverence and fear, for our God is 'a consuming fire (πῦρ καταναλίσκον)' (cf. Deut. 4:24; 9:3).” This final warning from Deuteronomy is balanced by what appears to be an allusion to the promise of Deut. 31:6, 8 (“It is YHWH who goes before you; he will be with you, he will not fail you or forsake you; do not fear or be dismayed”) contained in Heb. 13:5. If so, the letter ends with both warning and encouragement drawn from Deuteronomy, the point in Israel's history where it is about to enter God's rest.

V. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to trace the theme of continuing exodus through the letter to the Hebrews. According to the author, Joshua was unable to lead the people into God's promised rest because of their unbelief. David, writing hundreds of years later, attests to the fact that none have entered into God's rest and that the promise still remains (Ps. 95:11). The author re-reads Israel's history in light of this assertion to show that, from the inception of the nation in the calling of Abraham up until the present day, the exodus period has persisted. Nonetheless, the community is to be encouraged by the fact that it is not at an initial stage in the exodus such as Sinai (12:18-21) but has drawn near to the promised city of Zion, the city of God's rest. The letter to the Hebrews thus envisions its audience at the very spot that the book of Deuteronomy envisions the people of Israel—at the doorstep of God's promised land of rest. By means of this rewriting and reconfiguration of Israel's history, the author of the letter to the Hebrews demonstrates to his readers that their experience is in continuity with the entire history of Israel, and should be deemed as evidence for the fact that they are God's children, to whom the long-awaited rest is still open.

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66 I follow the rhetorical division as suggested by Koester, Hebrews, 554-555.
67 So too, Ellingworth, Epistle, 699-700, Koester, Hebrews, 559. Both point out that Philo, De confusione linguarum 166, contains this exact phrase, which appears to be a conflation of Deut. 31:6, 8 and Gen. 28:15. The lack of textual evidence militates against W. Wrede, Das literarische Rätsel des Hebräerbriefes (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1906), and Buchanan, To the Hebrews, 267-8, who argue that Hebrews 13 is not original.
68 This is pointed out by J.M. Casey, Eschatology in Heb 12:14-29: An Exegetical Study (Ph.D. diss.; Catholic University of Leuven, 1977) 570-571.