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# TWO CONTRASTING PORTRAITS OF THE EXODUS GENERATION IN HEBREWS: HOW REDEMPTIVE HISTORY EXPLAINS THE TEXT

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## I. INTRODUCTION

There are two very different pictures of the Exodus generation (or wilderness generation) in the Letter to the Hebrews. The first picture of the Exodus generation extends from Hebrews 3 to 4. This picture is entirely negative and characterized by apostasy.<sup>1</sup> This is the generation who left Egypt, hardened their hearts, put Yahweh to the test, went astray, did not know God's ways, were evil, disobedient, and fell away (Heb. 3:7-12). This exemplary act of sin is connected to Psalm 95 as it addresses a later generation and exhorts them 'not to harden their hearts today, as the rebellious generation in the wilderness hardened theirs'.<sup>2</sup> In a word—that Exodus generation is the epitome of *rebellion* and an enduring image of what should be avoided for all generations of God's people. The second picture of the Exodus generation occurs in Hebrews 11:29 ('By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned'). It is the only reference to a group of people exercising faith (*pistis*) in the famous 'Hall of Faith'.<sup>3</sup> This picture is both short and entirely positive.<sup>4</sup> The generation who crossed the Red Sea did so 'by faith'. This generation is part of the magisterial

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<sup>1</sup> This negative portrait is also found in 4 Ezra 7:106-11 and CD 2:16ff. See Pamela M. Eisenbaum, *The Jewish Heroes of Christian History: Hebrews 11 in Literary Context* (SBLMS; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1997), p.172 n.148. I explore the negative portrait in Psalm 106 below.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Nashville: B&H, 2015), p. 121.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), p. 618.

<sup>4</sup> Ben Witherington III notes: 'The author moves smoothly from the personal displays of trust shown by Moses to the trust in God displayed by the people of Israel in the Exodus and the Conquest.' *Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2000), p. 413.

‘cloud of witnesses’ (Heb. 12:1) who were ‘commended’ by God (Heb. 11:2, 39). In a word—they were also full of *faith*.<sup>5</sup>

This contrast raises important questions about the theology of the writer to the Hebrews. Are these even the same group of people? How is it possible to have this juxtaposition within the same epistle? Apologetic questions aside (e.g., Bible contradiction studies), this contrast provides for an interesting and relatively unexplored window into the theology and salvation-historical nuances of the epistle. Surprisingly, it is difficult to locate extended discussion of this specific matter in commentaries and exegetical studies on Hebrews.<sup>6</sup> Some briefly allude to this contrast in Hebrews, but without significant comment.<sup>7</sup> In addition, there are no textual variants that could provide an alternative reading that would alleviate the tension.<sup>8</sup>

Commentators often note how the author of Hebrews does not draw on any figures in Israel’s history during the wilderness wanderings. The next passage in Hebrews 11:30 jumps to the battle for Jericho. This literary evidence points to the conclusion that the author was aware of a contrast between Hebrews 3-4 and 11. The fact that the ‘Hall of Faith’ moves directly to the conquest of Jericho (in Heb. 11:30) and passes over the failures in the wilderness may attest to the writer’s intention to draw

<sup>5</sup> In his pastoral commentary, Richard D. Phillips succinctly states, ‘Despite their many failures and rebellions, that generation did perform one great act of faith: the exodus itself and the passage through the Red Sea.’ *Hebrews* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2006), p. 506.

<sup>6</sup> The following commentaries do not address Israel’s apostasy as a contrast in relationship to Hebrews 11:29: Barnabas Lindars, *The Theology of the Letter to the Hebrews* (New York/Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), *passim*; David deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), p. 414; James W. Thompson, *Hebrews* (Paideia Commentaries; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), p. 243; Victor C. Pfitzer, *Hebrews* (ANTC; Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), p. 166. Harold W. Attridge’s interaction consists of the following brief footnote on Heb. 11:29: ‘Contrast the faithlessness of the exodus generation in chaps. 3-4’ (*Hebrews* [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989], p. 343 n. 90). Clearly, there is a lacuna in the scholarship on this point.

<sup>7</sup> William Lane states: ‘The writer had earlier referred to the faithlessness of the wilderness generation in 3:16-19.’ *Hebrews 9-13* (WBC 47B; Dallas: Word, 1998), p. 378.

<sup>8</sup> F.F. Bruce, ‘Textual Problems in the Epistle to the Hebrews’, in *Scribes and Scripture: New Testament Essays in Honour of J Harold Greenlee*, ed. by David Alan Black (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992), pp. 27-39.

two very different pictures of this generation.<sup>9</sup> This is an argument from silence but the absence of figures such as Joshua is ‘glaring’.<sup>10</sup>

As an aside, one scholar has concluded that those who left Egypt through the Red Sea cannot be the same people who rebelled in the wilderness: these ‘faithful old saints in Hebrews 11 cannot be identified with the Sinai community in Hebrews 3:7-4:11’.<sup>11</sup> If this were true, it would put the whole matter to rest. But this view is idiosyncratic and there is no evidence put forth as to legitimize it.

This study will describe and evaluate a total of three positions of this contrast between Hebrews 3-4 and Hebrews 11. First, I will evaluate the attempt to reconcile this text based on Moses’ representative headship. Second, I will evaluate the attempt to use remnant theology as a hermeneutical adjudicator. Finally, I will advance a third view by arguing that *the pictures of the Exodus generation in Hebrews 3-4 and 11 are theologically coherent and cogent when evaluated in light of the author’s use of redemptive history.*

## II. THE EXODUS GENERATION AND MOSES’ HEADSHIP

Can Moses’ position as covenantal head or representative of Israel help to explain the two different portraits of the Exodus generation? This possible solution would mean that the Exodus generation exercised faith only in the sense that their federal representative Moses exercised faith. To use the language of Pauline theology: ‘here [in the Red Sea] they were baptized into Moses’.<sup>12</sup> The actions of the head can be put to the account of the whole, allowing one to speak of the nation acting in faith.

Simon Kistemaker’s brief comments in his expository commentary seem to move in this direction. Kistemaker argues that the writer of Hebrews ‘chooses this act [of faith] in view of Moses’ trust in God’.<sup>13</sup> Other writers are simply not clear on this matter. N.T. Wright first observes that putting blood of the Passover lamb on the door-post was an act of faith—a legitimate observation that is nonetheless absent in Hebrews 11. When Wright’s pastoral commentary gets to Israel’s passage through the Red

<sup>9</sup> Attridge, *Hebrews*, p. 344.

<sup>10</sup> Eisenbaum, *Jewish Heroes*, p. 172.

<sup>11</sup> Kiwoong Son, *Zion Symbolism in Hebrews: Hebrews 12:18-24 as Hermeneutical Key to Epistle* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), p. 143.

<sup>12</sup> Fritz Laubach draws heavily from Pauline theology (1 Corinthians 10) in his commentary on Hebrews 11:29 in *Der Brief an die Hebräer* (Wuppertal: R. Brockhaus, 1967), p. 241.

<sup>13</sup> Simon Kistemaker, *Exposition of Hebrews* (NTC, 15; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), p. 343.

Sea, he refers to Moses' trust in God.<sup>14</sup> Michael Cosby even suggests that in Hebrews 11:29, 'the Israelite people are joined to Moses' in order to form a new subject.<sup>15</sup>

A good reason for considering Moses' headship is the canonical parallel in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13 where Paul also uses the Exodus generation as an exemplar for warning. In fact, Paul argues that the whole nation was 'baptized into Moses' (1 Cor. 10:2). Such a clear canonical parallel cannot be easily dismissed, even if the Pauline authorship of Hebrews has very few supporters (Eta Linneman being a notable exception). Nor should we accept the conclusion that Paul's use of the Exodus generation was 'upholding a wholly different moral'.<sup>16</sup> The same text in the OT could be used by NT writers in different ways, but it is not clear that is case here. Both Paul and the author of Hebrews envision a robust faith that produces action. Both use exemplars, both negative and positive, for their task (Heb. 6:12 // 1 Cor. 6:11).

Perhaps the best reason for using Moses as the key to understanding the 'faith' of the Israelites in Hebrews 11:29 is the literary structure of the textual unit. Gareth Lee Cockerill provides a compelling argument by observing that there are parallels between the life of Moses (Heb. 11:23-29) and the life of Abraham (Heb. 11:8-12, 17-19)—with seven elements in each.<sup>17</sup> In each section of seven elements, the fourth is 'the centerpiece'.<sup>18</sup> For Moses, the centerpiece is his action of keeping the Passover by faith (Heb. 11:28). This parallelism gives Cockerill reason to believe that v. 29 is part of the life of Moses. It is true that Moses inspired the people to have faith through his proclamation or preaching.<sup>19</sup> His own faith expressed itself in his identification with the people of God. And Moses serves as important shadow of Jesus' sonship through his faithful service 'in all God's house' (Heb. 3:2). On the one hand, Cockerill states that Hebrews 11:29 is 'from the life of Moses' but then he goes on to clarify on the next page that Hebrews 11:29-31 are examples 'from the lives of those who

<sup>14</sup> N.T. Wright, *Hebrews for Everyone* (London: SPCK, 2004), p. 141.

<sup>15</sup> Michael R. Cosby, *The Rhetorical Composition and Function of Hebrews 11* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1988), p. 47.

<sup>16</sup> Marie E. Isaacs comments on the discontinuity between Hebrews and 1 Corinthians in *Reading Hebrews and James: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2002), p. 57.

<sup>17</sup> Gareth Lee Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), p. 564.

<sup>18</sup> Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 564.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Lea states: 'Moses' faith must have inspired their faith.' *Hebrews, James* (HNTC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), p. 204.

follow Moses'.<sup>20</sup> A close reading of Cockerill's argument seems to be that there is indeed some literary parallelism between Moses and Abraham in Hebrews 11. But it is not clear that this parallel extends to Hebrews 11:29 which should parallel 11:17. Cockerill himself notes that the Moses section Hebrews 11:23-29 'is no mere repeat of the previous section'.<sup>21</sup> Thus, it seems best to conclude that the Moses section has some elements of development from Abraham that would create some discontinuity between Hebrews 11:29 and the rest of the Moses section.

In spite of all of these reasons to consider Moses' headship as a hermeneutical key to resolving interpretive difficulties, it will not stand up to one simple exegetical observation: the subject of the faith exercised in Hebrews 11:29 is plural. Moses is indeed the mediator of the covenant and the leader of Israel.<sup>22</sup> But Moses' two-fold status does not negate the individual and corporate responsibility of the people within the nation to exercise faith. P.T. O'Brien observes in a footnote that 'the author had prepared for the change of subject in v. 28, "*their* firstborn", the grammatical antecedent of which is "the people of God" in v. 25'.<sup>23</sup> Thus, Hebrews 11 portrays the Exodus generation as both related to and distinct from Moses.

### III. THE EXODUS GENERATION AND REMNANT THEOLOGY

Can remnant theology help to explain the two different portraits of the Exodus generation in Hebrews? Remnant theology is the concept that Yahweh always ensured that there would be a 'faithful few' amongst the mass of apostates in Israel. Even if the whole nation was corrupt, there would be some true believers left who would not bend the knee to idols. If this remnant was present within the apostate generation of the Exodus, it would be plausible to refer to the whole as faithful (or full of faith) based on the actions of the few.

This seems to be the tack taken by John Calvin. He explains: 'It is certain, that many in that multitude were unbelieving; but the Lord granted to the faith of a few, that the whole multitude should pass through the

<sup>20</sup> Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, pp. 564-5.

<sup>21</sup> Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 564.

<sup>22</sup> O. Palmer Robertson notes, 'In these various roles he [Moses] serves by divine appointment as a prophetic figure anticipating a greater than Moses yet to come who will at the same time be "like" Moses (Deut 18:15, 18)' in *God's People in the Wilderness: The Church in Hebrews* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications), p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> P.T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), p. 435. Emphasis original.

Red Sea dry-shod.<sup>24</sup> Calvin seems to see that a conflict must be resolved between faithful and faithless caricatures of Israel. The commentator Marie E. Isaacs states: 'Omitting any mention of the faithless *among* the wilderness generation who did not see the promises of God realized, our author moves on swiftly.'<sup>25</sup> Without elaboration, it is difficult to determine if Isaacs thinks that there was a faithful remnant and an apostate group *among* that generation.

The difficulty with this explanation is that the text of Hebrews 11:29 does not support a contrast, even if implicit, between an apostate Israel and a faithful remnant. The contrast in the Greek works at the discourse level rather than the syntax level. The logical contrastive 'but' in the ESV, NET, NRSV, and NIV is an interpretive move that does not reflect any Greek word.

There is no separate noun that identifies the subject of the action of crossing the Red Sea. The subject of the action verb (*diabainō*) for crossing the Red Sea is implicit as a third-person plural.<sup>26</sup> The literary characters in Hebrews 11:29 are in some sense 'anonymous'.<sup>27</sup> The literary characters who trusted God's promises are simply 'they'.<sup>28</sup> As noted above, there is strong exegetical evidence that ties the 'people of God' in v. 25 with the plural subject in v. 29. With the third-person plural verbs, the explicit reference to the 'Egyptians' (*Aigyptios*) sets up a contrast of nation *versus* nation. A comparison with the citation of Jeremiah 31 in Hebrews 8 will support the conclusion that the 'people of God' is the 'house of Israel' (Heb. 8:10). Kistemaker explains, 'the contrast is between the nation Israel that expressed faith in God and thus was victorious and the unbelieving king and army of Egypt who perished in the waters of the

<sup>24</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Hebrews*, trans. by John Owen (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1853), p. 299. Elsewhere in the commentary, Calvin refers to the 'remnant' of Jews saved from exile as a pattern that extends through post-exilic history until the coming of Jesus (pp. 68-9).

<sup>25</sup> Isaacs, *Reading Hebrews and James*, p. 136. Emphasis mine.

<sup>26</sup> 'Plural verbs give the impression that many people performed each act of faith.' Gareth L. Cockerill, 'The Better Resurrection (Heb. 11:35): A Key to the Structure and Rhetorical Purpose of Hebrews 11', *TynB* 51 (2000), 219.

<sup>27</sup> Eisenbaum, *Jewish Heroes*, p. 172.

<sup>28</sup> Donald A. Hagner states, 'The people (lit., "they") exhibited the same kind of faith as Moses did. They were confident that God would deliver them and thus prove himself faithful to his promises' in *Hebrews* (UBCS; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), p. 201.

Red Sea'.<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, the reader must infer who is crossing the Red Sea from the context.

#### IV. THE EXODUS GENERATION AND REDEMPTIVE HISTORY

The reader of Hebrews must come to two conclusions. First, the nation of Israel acted in faith collectively as they passed through the Red Sea. Second, they later acted in faithlessness and disobedience.<sup>30</sup> *The key to understanding how both of these actions are usable by the author of Hebrews for imitation and avoidance is the fact that they were historically separate events that occurred in a faith-then-apostasy sequence.* For the author of Hebrews, the historical order in which events took place has a corresponding relationship to salvation-history or redemptive history. Because the nation of Israel acted in faith when they walked through the Red Sea *before* they rebelled in the wilderness, these two acts may be seen separately. The historical incidents are independent yet they relate to each other as part of the comprehensive arc of redemptive history.<sup>31</sup> Of course, as Cockerill notes, the 'simple chronological order' of the events of Moses' life in Hebrews 11 does not negate arrangement for rhetorical impact.<sup>32</sup>

**4.1 Redemptive History and the Past.** The clearest parallel of an interest in the relationship between history and salvation-history is found in the explanation of the 'law of Moses' and the 'word of the oath'. Notice how chronology plays a key role in the following passage:

For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, *which came later* than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever. (Heb. 7:28; ESV)

This text draws a comparison between the word of the oath and the Law of Moses. Because the 'word of the oath' that appoints a Son came (historically) after the Law of Moses, it holds more weight (salvation-historically). A significant portion of the author's Christology hangs on historical matters and the order in which certain acts of revelation were given. Thus, Jesus' Melchizedekian priesthood is superior to the priesthood of Aaron

<sup>29</sup> Kistemaker, *Exposition of Hebrews*, p. 343.

<sup>30</sup> Lea, *Hebrews*, James, p. 204.

<sup>31</sup> Eisenbaum focuses on the unity of the heroes in Hebrews 11: 'The biographic descriptions of each hero are not independent *historia*, as they are on the Greco-Roman lists, but part of one comprehensive *historia*' in *Jewish Heroes*, p. 81.

<sup>32</sup> Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, p. 565.



because it is based on a newer and definitive word.<sup>33</sup> This is perhaps the clearest example of a which-came-later theology. Other instances of this which-came-later theology include the following implicit or explicit chronological relationships: (1) God had to have rested *after* he created the world (Heb. 4:4), (2), God had to have spoken of a day of rest *after* Joshua entered Canaan (Heb. 4:8), (3) Levi had to be born *after* Abraham (Heb. 7:10).

Returning to our two contrasting portraits of the Exodus generation, we might say that both portraits are possible because of this which-came-later theology. Specifically the apostasy of Israel in the wilderness, as highlighted in Hebrews 3-4 comes later than the faith exercised during the Exodus and highlighted in Hebrews 11. The nation does not begin in unbelief. One event happens in the Red Sea and one event happens in the wilderness. In addition to the differences in geography, it is Israel's past that opens up the future for her. Both Moses and people of God trusted God's promises (Exod. 14:1-31) and moved forward against all human rationale.<sup>34</sup> Whereas the Passover required faith *without* evidence, the Exodus required faith *against* evidence, being hedged in by Egyptians behind and the sea in front.<sup>35</sup>

The presence of two contrasting pictures of the Exodus or Wilderness generation in also found in the Psalms. Like the letter to the Hebrews, there is a negative portrayal of Israel (Psalm 106) and positive portrayal (Psalm 124). This faith-then-apostasy pattern is highlighted by Ps 106:12-13 (ESV):

Then they believed his words;  
they sang his praise.  
But they soon forgot his works;  
they did not wait for his counsel.

What is significant about Psalm 106 is that it provides clues about how to reconcile these two portraits of Israel through an understanding of redemptive history. Israel truly 'believed his [Yahweh's] words'

<sup>33</sup> 'This oath signals God's definitive, last, superior word'. Isaacs, *Reading Hebrews and James*, p. 96.

<sup>34</sup> Exodus 14:15-16 (ESV) provides a good example of Yahweh's directive that required faith: 'The Lord said to Moses 'Why do you cry to me? Tell the people of Israel to go forward. Lift up your staff, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it, that the people of Israel may go through the sea on dry ground.'

<sup>35</sup> Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; New York/London: Doubleday, 2001), p. 510.

(Ps 106:12). They even sang his praise! The very next verse explains the turn of events with reference to time: ‘they *soon* forgot his works; they did not *wait* for his counsel’ (Ps 106:13). Psalm 106 makes clear that apostasy came (quickly!) after faith. The historical order of events in the past sets up the paraenesis for the present: ‘both we and our fathers have sinned...’ (Ps 106:6).<sup>36</sup> It is the chronological order of these events that provides the context for a redemptive-historical lens for the present and the opportunity for repentance.

For the author of Hebrews, historical chronology is vitally important because certain events have corresponding relationships to the outworking of God’s plan of redemption. History is everything because salvation-history is everything. For example, if it could be established that the historical order in which certain events occurred are incorrect, a large part of the theology of Jesus’ priesthood would collapse. With respect to the juxtaposition of Hebrews 3-4 and 11, it is the faith-then-apostasy sequence that provides cogency. If Israel started out in apostasy and began with hardness of heart toward Yahweh, the historical details and salvation-historical details would collapse.

Historical accuracy and theology are bound together for the writer of Hebrews. Whereas some have argued that there is ‘considerably *more* than an awareness of simple chronological pastness, presentness, and futurity’ in Hebrews, we must not conclude that simple chronology is insignificant.<sup>37</sup>

**4.2 Redemptive History and the Present.** While the author of Hebrews allows the entire priesthood of Jesus to roost on the ledge of the historical chronology of divine revelation, he simultaneously seeks to make the reader consumed with the present moment. The present is the time in which faith is still possible. N.T. Wright uses simple language to capture how this works with the Exodus generation: ‘Hebrews wants its readers to think of themselves as in some ways like that generation, walking through the wilderness on the way to God’s promised future; and they mustn’t make the mistakes that the Israelites did.’<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> ‘In each case the psalmist makes plain that the faithfulness of the succeeding generations lies in remembering the great things the Lord has done for them.’ W. Ross Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus* (NSBT; Downers Grove: IVP, 2012), p. 52.

<sup>37</sup> Graham Hughes, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics: The Epistle to the Hebrews as a New Testament Example of Biblical Interpretation* (SNTSMS 36; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 38.

<sup>38</sup> Wright, *Hebrews for Everyone*, p. 28.

According to Wright, each person, as long as the Lord tarries, has the opportunity to identify with the Exodus generation and exercise faith. The writer of Hebrews captures this eschatological relationship to the present through the hook-word 'today' as found in the citations from Psalm 95:7-11 in Hebrews 3-4.<sup>39</sup> Although the Exodus generation started well, they did not finish well. They did not persevere in faith and are condemned for their 'unbelief' during their rebellion in the wilderness (Heb. 3:19). Graham Hughes explains: 'The decisions made in it (the present) determine in a quite radical way the future for the individual'.<sup>40</sup>

Our conclusion does not negate Pamela Eisenbaum's conclusion that Hebrews 11 has a 'collective historical trajectory'.<sup>41</sup> But this statement must be qualified. The collective trajectory was completed for the Exodus generation in their rebellion. But the trajectory can be paused to highlight the future that is opened by faith when people respond 'today'. The faith exercised by the Exodus generation as they proceeded through the walls of water of the Red Sea was genuine faith. It was a faith made in the ancient past but it is also a faith that points to the *present* need to persevere.

**4.3 Redemptive History and the Future.** The faith exercised by the Exodus generation as they walked through the Red Sea is also a *contrast that points to an eschatological judgment*. The writer seeks to argue in Hebrews 11:29 that those who crossed the Red Sea possessed faith whereas the Egyptians attempted the same and died.<sup>42</sup> There are proverbial sheep and goats in this scene and no middle ground is to be found. Lane concludes: 'The fundamental distinction recognized by the writer is the division between those who believe and those who do not.'<sup>43</sup> Likewise, F.F. Bruce notes, 'our author implies that they [the Egyptians] came to

<sup>39</sup> For a study on hook-words or the Midrash technique of *gezerah shawah* see David H. Wenkel, 'Gezerah Shawah as Analogy in the Epistle to the Hebrews', *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 37 (2007), 62-8.

<sup>40</sup> Hughes, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics*, p. 39. Emphasis mine.

<sup>41</sup> Eisenbaum argues that the list of heroes is an attempt to retell 'the story of Israel's history' (*Jewish Heroes*, p. 81).

<sup>42</sup> Erich Gräßer states, 'Die Ägypter wollen es den Israeliten gleichtun, um deren Flucht zu verhindern.' ['The Egyptians want to imitate the Israelites, to prevent their escape.'] *An die Hebräer: Hebr 10:19-13:25* (EKK XVII, 3 Vols; Zürich: Benziger; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990), 3, p. 180. The concept of imitation may be another way to consider this contrast between Israel and Egypt.

<sup>43</sup> Lane, *Hebrews* 9-13, p. 379.

grief because they had no faith'.<sup>44</sup> Those who are of faith succeed and live whereas those who do not have faith perish.

The contrast is between the people of God who have faith and the enemies of God who have no faith. If Lane and Bruce are correct, the Egyptians are not enemies of God because they are Egyptians. They perish because they lack faith. Thus, it likely functions as a small portal into the eschatological judgment at the end of the age. This contrast is similar to the contrast between Israel and Egypt/Canaan in *Wisdom of Solomon* 10:15-12:11.<sup>45</sup> The apocryphal *Wisdom of Solomon* states: 'She [wisdom] brought them over the Red Sea, and led them through deep waters; but she drowned their enemies, and cast them up from the depths of the sea' (WisSol 10:18-19; NRSV).

Pamela Eisenbaum points out that the author of Hebrews expects the reader to understand that those who have received the final 'word' of Jesus have a privileged position when compared to all the heroes of the Hall of Faith.<sup>46</sup> We know the end of the story and the fulfilment of God's promises. This is where the Hall of Faith leads: 'God had provided something better for us' (Heb. 11:40). It is faith and the reception of that which is 'better' that defines whether one will be saved or perish in the end. We must be careful not to gaze at the Exodus generation to the exclusion of looking at Jesus. A study such as this is not meant to cause redemptive history myopia. All human examples of faith fall short in light of the faithfulness of Jesus—the pioneer and perfecter of the faith (Heb. 12:2).<sup>47</sup>

## V. CONCLUSION

The presence of the Exodus generation in the Hall of Faith of Hebrews 11 is as problematic as the scandalous figures of Barak, Samson, and Jephthah.<sup>48</sup> These additional difficulties must be set aside for another day.

<sup>44</sup> F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 316.

<sup>45</sup> Eisenbaum, *Jewish Heroes*, p. 172 n. 148.

<sup>46</sup> Eisenbaum, *Jewish Heroes*, p. 83.

<sup>47</sup> Todd D. Still, 'Christos as Pistos: The Faith(fulness) of Jesus in the Epistle to the Hebrews', CBQ 69 (2007), p. 752 = *idem*, in *A Cloud of Witnesses: The Theology of Hebrews in Its Ancient Contexts*, ed. by R. Bauckham, D. Driver, and N. MacDonald (LNTS, 387; London: T & T Clark, 2008), p. 46.

<sup>48</sup> D. Stephen Long notes that these figures have perplexed commentators since Chrysostom in *Hebrews: A Theological Commentary on the Bible* (Louisville: WJKP, 2011), p. 195. Eisenbaum echoes this conclusion in her monograph on Hebrews 11, noting 'some of the author's selections are surprising' in *Jewish Heroes*, p. 82.

What we have addressed is the fact that the Exodus generation is both an exemplar of faith *and* apostasy in the letter to the Hebrews. Thus, the Exodus generation is a source of comparison for the people of God of *all ages*—both positively and negatively. Broadly stated, our thesis is that the author's nuances of redemptive history can provide an explanation for this bold contrast.

The redemptive historical thesis explains the whole as well as the parts of Hebrews. Faith is both separable *and* inseparable from endurance.<sup>49</sup> This is because the marathon race of endurance must have a beginning—a moment when the runner begins to move. For the Exodus generation, the rebellion in the wilderness *came later than* the initial act of faith in crossing the Red Sea. As historical events and redemptive historical events, the exodus and rebellion are both separable and inseparable. We saw earlier how Psalms 106 and 124 also provide contrasting portraits of the Exodus generation—a possible source of antecedent theology for writer of Hebrews.<sup>50</sup> As separable events, the writer of Hebrews takes the initial act of faith and hits the 'pause' button, so to speak, viewing it as an isolated event. As inseparable events, this same Exodus generation failed to demonstrate that this initial act of faith produced the enduring fruit of obedience and thus proved their apostate condition.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Thompson notes, 'As the author indicates in 10:36-39 and 12:1-11, faith is inseparable from endurance' (*Hebrews*, p. 249).

<sup>50</sup> The letter to the Hebrews also approximately parallels Jesus' teaching about faith in the Parable of the Sower in the Synoptics. Some seed from the sower falls on the rock and produces genuine growth. But this growth eventually withers away because it had no moisture (Luke 8:6-7). Jesus explains that this means some 'believe for a while' (Luke 8:13) and then fall away—following the faith-then-apostasy pattern.

<sup>51</sup> 'Faith and obedience are distinguishable but inseparable. Faith is the root and obedience is the fruit.' Schreiner, *Hebrews*, p. 496.