

biblical images and common intertestamental traditions inform the author in his choice of each hero, but the peculiarity of his list lies in the particular combination of people and events. Only the principle(s) of selection can tell us what Rahab and Abraham have in common.

Usually scholars have taken the principle of selection for granted. The anaphoric use of $\pi\acute{\iota}\omicron\tau\epsilon\iota$ has led to the assumption that each hero is an individual who exemplifies faith. Occasionally scholars have noticed that most of those included on the list are not good examples of faith,² at least not the best the Bible has to offer. Some scholars attribute the choice of heroes to the author's dependence on a source.³ The author has then strung together this list with the catchword $\pi\acute{\iota}\omicron\tau\epsilon\iota$. But this is a less-than satisfying analysis. It is highly unlikely that Hebrews 11 is dependent upon a source, although the author was familiar with and may even have been imitating prototypical texts from the LXX.⁴

Although every list exhibits peculiarities, I intend to demonstrate that the Hebrews list differs markedly from any intertestamental prototypes to which one could point (indicated by inclusions like Rahab, and omissions like Joshua and Phinehas). The comment that any Jew could have written this text (with the exception of vv. 26 and 39)⁵—a comment made by more than one commentator—indicates how scholars have failed to perceive the distinctiveness of Hebrews 11. Indeed, the question of the principle behind the selection has remained largely unasked. And, curiously, even those scholars who insightfully point out that the heroes are not the best examples of faith invariably attempt to isolate that element of faith in each example that is alleged to be in the mind of the author.⁶

2. H. Windisch, *Der Hebräerbrief* (HNT, 4; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1931), p. 99; H. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 306.

3. Windisch (*Hebräerbrief*, pp. 98-99) and O. Michel, (*Der Brief an die Hebräer* [MeyerK 13; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1966], pp. 422-23) were influential in disseminating this idea.

4. See Eisenbaum, 'Jewish Heroes', pp. 103-105; and P. Ellingworth, *Commentary on Hebrews* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 558-59.

5. See, e.g., S. Sowers, *The Hermeneutics of Philo and Hebrews* (Basel Studies of Theology, 1; Zurich: EVZ, 1965), p. 133; and Windisch, *Hebräerbrief*, p. 98.

6. The most striking example of this is Attridge, who explicitly states at the beginning of his commentary on this section that most of the biblical stories referred to do not explicitly highlight faith (*Hebrews*, p. 306). And yet in his otherwise thoughtful exegesis of each and every hero, he consistently attempts to find the 'faith element'

HEROES AND HISTORY IN HEBREWS 11

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By listing the great biblical heroes and their deeds, ch. 11 of the Epistle to the Hebrews preserves a rare early Christian vision of Jewish religious history. Like all those who recount the past, the author of Hebrews presents history selectively. The *principle(s) of selection*—that is, what criteria the writer uses to include one hero and omit another, as well as what biographical elements of a given hero are included or excluded—is the interpretive key which sets this text in high relief against contemporary Jewish texts to which Hebrews 11 is often compared, texts like Sirach 44-50, 1 Macc. 2.51-60, Wisdom 10, and Covenant of Damascus 2-3.¹

Like all the other lists and summaries, Hebrews 11 displays peculiarities. Rahab, for example, occurs on no other Jewish list. (In fact, women never appear on Jewish hero lists.) Why is she included here? The traditional answer is that Rahab is an example of faith like all the other members of the list. She risked her own life to protect Joshua's spies. This is partially true, but with so many biblical heroes to choose from, why make the choice of Rahab? Why not Debra? Furthermore, the fact that Rahab appears on the same list as Abraham and Moses makes a statement about her importance in general. Indeed, the analysis of the factors that led the author to choose a particular individual must be kept in a dialectical relationship to the list as a whole. Standard

1. These other hero catalogues are not the only comparable texts, but they have been the most important ones for my study of Hebrews 11. A fuller account of my argument concerning the Hebrews hero catalogue, including discussions of various ancient hagiologies, can be found in 'The Jewish Heroes of Christian History: Hebrews 11 in Literary Context' (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1995). There is one other monograph that compares Hebrews 11 to other hero lists, that of M. Cosby, *The Rhetorical Composition and Function of Hebrews 11 in Light of Example Lists in Antiquity* (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1988). Cosby's work, which was very useful to me in my study of Hebrews 11, concentrates on the technical, rhetorical aspects of the text.

As I am about to demonstrate, having faith is not in and of itself a foundational principle of selection.⁷ Having faith is only one facet of a multi-faceted profile. I have identified four qualities that the heroes have in common—all of which probably factor into the author's decision to include these heroes. While not every hero possesses every one of the traits that I will identify as the author's principles of selection, the majority of them do.

Furthermore, like the lists of biblical heroes in Sirach 44–50, Wisdom 10, and Covenant of Damascus 2–3, Hebrews 11 also functions as a retelling of Israelite history. Not only is the goal of this study to abstract a profile of the hero, but we must assess the author's diachronic retelling of biblical history. Each hero and event listed plays a role in shaping the author's picture of that history. Thus, whatever criteria the author uses to select heroes apply also to his historiographic understanding of biblical history.

Profile of the Hebrews Hero

Death or Near-Death Experience

All the heroes die or have near-death experiences.⁸ Their deaths or near-deaths are then followed by some kind of new beginning.

The first three heroes our author names are Abel, Enoch, and Noah (vv. 4–7). Abel is the world's first murder victim. Even if Enoch did not literally die, he passed from his earthly existence to a divine one. Noah does not die. He in fact is spared while the rest of the world dies. His survival of the flood certainly counts as a near-death experience, which is succeeded by a new beginning. Although the biblical text does not reflect on the post-mortem existence of Abel⁹ and Enoch, there exist

that must be present in the author's mind. About Moses he says, 'Hebrews is not concerned with extraordinary experiences attributed to Moses in and of themselves, but with his faith' (p. 343). Indeed, the author of Hebrews has not selected arbitrary extraordinary experiences, but neither has he chosen them necessarily because they exemplify a *specific* manifestation of πίστις.

7. The primary function of the anaphoric use of πίστις is rhetorical, viz., to create the effect of an enormous—even innumerable—number of examples. See Cosby, *Rhetorical Composition*, pp. 41–55.

8. This characteristic has been observed by J. Swetnam, *Jesus and Isaac: A Study of the Epistle to the Hebrews in Light of the Aqedah* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), pp. 95–96.

9. When the author of Hebrews says of Abel 'although he is dead, he still

intertestamental traditions that do, and it is likely that the author knew of these: Abel was the first figure to ascend to heaven. There he resides as judge of the righteous and the wicked.¹⁰ Enoch was of course known in intertestamental tradition as a visionary as well as an eschatological judge with a God's-eye point of view.¹¹

Abraham is said to be 'as good as dead' (παῦτα νεκροῦμενου)¹² and Sarah 'beyond the appropriate age' (παρὰ καιρὸν ἡλικίας) when a new life, that is, Isaac, is given to them (vv. 11–12). Isaac himself comes as close to death as anyone on the list without actually dying. The fact that he is so close to death but saved at the last minute is, in the words of our author, like the experience of resurrection itself (v. 19).¹³ Although the author is very brief in his mention of the patriarchs, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, he depicts all of them at the time of their deaths (vv. 20–22): Isaac when he blindly blesses Jacob and Esau, Jacob when he blesses the sons of Joseph, and Joseph when he predicts the exodus.

The connection with death in the description of Moses is more vague, but nevertheless present in two different instances. In the birth story, the child Moses is miraculously saved from death (v. 23). Later, the mature Moses, when he flees Egypt for Midian, believes his life is in danger (v. 27).¹⁴ The mention of the people crossing the Red Sea and speaks', he alludes to Gen. 4.10, where it says that Abel's blood cried out to the Lord (cf. Heb. 12.24). Thus, the author interprets the Genesis text to mean that Abel did have a post-mortem existence.

10. See 1 *En.* 22.7ff. and *T. Abr.* 13.

11. Most of *I Enoch* attests to this portrait of Enoch, but see especially chs. 1–36.

12. This description of Abraham is probably traditional; it is found also in Paul, Rom. 4.19.

13. Λογισάμενος [Ἀβραάμ] ὅτι καὶ ἐκ νεκρῶν ἐγείρειν δυνατός ὁ θεός, ὅθεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐν παραβολῇ ἐκοιμίσαστο.

14. An exegetical difficulty exists in v. 27 concerning the statement that Moses was not afraid of the king's anger. Commentators such as H. Braun (*An die Hebräer* [HNT, 14; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1984], p. 382); F.F. Bruce (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], pp. 312–13); and Attridge (*Hebrews*, p. 342) understand v. 27 to refer to Moses' flight to Midian. The problem with this interpretation is precisely the comment that Moses was not afraid, since the biblical text indicates that he was afraid (Exod. 2.14). Thus, other interpreters, such as H. Montefiore (*A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* [New York: Harper, 1964], p. 204); and J. Héring (*The Epistle to the Hebrews* [London: Epworth, 1970], p. 105) believe that v. 27 refers to the exodus. The problem with this interpretation is chronology. The exodus of the people happens after the Passover sacrifice (v. 28), and up until now the author has not deviated from following biblical

the walls of Jericho falling down (vv. 29-30) are too vague for us to define their characteristics, although clearly the people are in danger when they cross the Red Sea. Rahab, if she had not assisted the spies would surely have perished with the people of Jericho (v. 31). Thus, all the heroes die or almost die, but the event is followed by a new beginning.¹⁵ The author does not always describe this aspect explicitly, but he always pinpoints the end of life/new life moment in the career of the hero.

Ability to See into the Future (The Meaning of the Heroes' Faith)

Most of the heroes on the list have the ability to anticipate the future. Thus, in the midst of adverse circumstances they are confident because they foresee something better. Given the definition of faith ('faith is the realization of what is hoped for, proof of things not seen')¹⁶ by which the author introduced the hero catalogue, this characteristic is the closest we come to seeing the heroes as examples of faith.

Four heroes are explicitly described as having knowledge of the future. Noah receives an oracle, by which he knows what the future will bring and so he builds the ark (v. 7). Abraham follows the instructions of God, even if they do not appear to lead to the fulfillment of the promises. Though he lives in the land of promise as in a 'foreign land', he ultimately knows that a heavenly homeland awaits (vv. 14-16). The author portrays Isaac as 'in the know' when he blesses Jacob and Esau (v. 20), rather than as an old man who was duped by his wife and son, as he is in Genesis 27. Joseph, as I already mentioned, predicts the great event of the exodus from Egypt. Moses has foreknowledge of Christ and the divine rewards that await him in the distant future (v. 26).

For the other heroes, their ability to see into the future is implied by their actions as described by the author of Hebrews. Rahab, for example, helps the spies in advance of the battle (v. 31). As a result, she saves chronology. This situation has prompted M.R. D'Angelo to argue that the author has conflated the two events (*Moses in the Letter to the Hebrews* (SBLDS, 42; Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979), pp. 59-62).

15. Cf. R. Brawley ('Discursive Structure and the Unseen in Hebrews 2:8 and 11:1: A Neglected Aspect of the Context', *CBQ* 55 [1993], pp. 95-96) who argues that events like the flood and the splitting of the Red Sea are proto-apocalyptic events in the author's eyes.

16. All translations of Hebrews 11 are mine; other biblical citations are from the NRSV, except when otherwise indicated.

herself and her family. In the case of Abel and Enoch, this quality is more subtle but still present. Both are said to have received divine approval during their earthly life. To be sure, divine approval is something which by definition applies to all the heroes on this list as well as on other Jewish lists. But the approval of Abel and Enoch earns them post-mortem rewards. Indeed, following Enoch's mention on the list, the author makes an exhortative aside: 'For it is necessary that one who approaches God has faith that he exists and that he is one who rewards those who seek him' (v. 6). We may therefore assume that Abel and Enoch's approval stems from their faith in the reality of God and in the knowledge of future rewards.

While the heroes have faith in, or knowledge of, future rewards, their present life is without reward or recognition for their faithfulness. Some scholars have emphasized the suffering which some heroes on the list are said to have endured.¹⁷ In my estimation these scholars have been overly influenced by the concluding verses,¹⁸ which are most likely present for rhetorical effect and not part of the body of the main list.¹⁹ The fact that the heroes are connected somehow with death may also influence scholars to assume suffering plays a key role in the selection of heroes. In my view, as we saw above, while death appears as a theme in the list, it is not necessarily connected with suffering. Of the heroes on the main list, Moses is the only one said to have suffered (v. 25). At the same time, none of the heroes have an easy time of life—Abraham wanders, Isaac is almost sacrificed, and so forth.

Another way of looking at the presence of this so-called theme of suffering is to understand it in relation to the theme of the heroes' ability to see the future. In order for the heroes to focus on future rewards, their present circumstances must be less than ideal. If they

17. Héring, *Epistle*, p. 100; D'Angelo, *Moses in Hebrews*, p. 27.

18. That is, vv. 33-38, which indeed cover a number of trials and tribulations. Vv. 33-34, however, emphasizes not the suffering created by trials, but the overcoming of them. These verses conclude the list for the purpose of drama.

19. V. 32 terminates the anaphoric use of $\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\iota$. In v. 33 and following, the author presents a rhetorical question followed by a rapid-fire list of names, which in turn followed by a list of deeds without names attached. As Cosby (*Rhetorical Composition*, pp. 58-59) has shown, the point of these verses is to create the impression that examples could be listed *ad infinitum*; the quick listing of names and the use of asyndeton enhance that impression. Thus, for my purposes, the main body of the catalogue ends at v. 32, and only heroes mentioned in vv. 1-32 are dealt with in this paper.

were satisfied with an earthly life filled with material niceties, they would not need to look to future rewards. The heroes' earthly life is filled with adverse circumstances, so as to contrast the poverty of their current existence with their future rewards. This aspect of the heroes' portrayal in Hebrews is closely related to the third characteristic, the alteration of status.

Alteration of Status

One of the most common attributes that biblical heroes are said to possess on Jewish Hellenistic hero lists, particularly Sirach 44-50, Wisdom 10, and 1 Macc. 2.51-60, is honor.²⁰ Furthermore, this honor is often communicated by demonstrating that the heroes have been blessed with earthly rewards such as wealth, power, and position. In fact, the heroes of Hebrews lack all the glamour and glory of the Jewish heroes as they appear on other lists. In the Hellenistic lists, earthly rewards and honor consistently play a major role. One particularly important characteristic of heroes who appear on the lists in Sirach 44-50, Wisdom 10, and 1 Maccabees 2 is that each hero receives rewards as signs of God's approval, and these rewards are bestowed during each hero's lifetime.

Indeed, in 1 Maccabees 2, the list is structured by the rewards accorded each member of the list.²¹ Joseph is rewarded with becoming lord of Egypt, Phinehas receives the covenant of the priesthood, Elijah has great zeal for the law and so is taken up, etc. In Wisdom 10, Sophia rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked in their own lifetime. Sophia guides and protects Jacob for example; 'she prospered him in his labors and increased the fruit of his toil' (v. 10). In the Sirach list

20. See Eisenbaum, 'Jewish Heroes', pp. 42-56.

21. The following chart illustrates how 1 Macc. 2.51-60 is structured by the rewards the heroes receive:

Hero	Deed	Reward
Abraham	tested	righteousness
Joseph	kept commandment	lord of Egypt
Phinehas	zealous	covenant of priesthood
Joshua	fulfilled	became judge
	commandment	
Caleb	testified	inheritance of land
David	merciful	throne
Elijah	zeal for law	taken up to heaven
Hannaniah, Azariah, and Mithael	believed	saved from flame
Daniel	innocent	delivered from lion

rewards also play a crucial role in describing each hero, and these rewards usually involve a position of honor.²² In fact, the introduction to Sirach 44-50 generically captures the high position in society which the heroes are assumed to enjoy:

The Lord apportioned to them great glory, his majesty from the beginning. There were those who ruled in their kingdoms, and made a name for themselves by their valor; those who gave counsel because they were intelligent; those who spoke in prophetic oracles; those who led the people by their counsels and by their knowledge of the people's lore; they were wise in their words of instruction; those who composed musical tunes, or put verses to writing; rich men endowed with resources, living peacefully in their homes—all these were honored in their generations, and were the pride of their times (44.2-7).

The heroes of Hebrews could not be further removed from this image. They do not receive honor or reward or even recognition in their own lifetime. Furthermore, the heroes are not depicted in the prime of their lives, but rather receive mention in connection with death. In addition, the heroes of Hebrews are not recorded for their impressive accomplishments and talents. None of the Hebrews heroes hold national office and none are said to have made a covenant with God. In short, their status has been altered; the heroes of Hebrews are not considered heroic for the usual reasons.

For example, when the author of Hebrews describes Moses as a hero, Moses' heroic qualities appear circumscribed, situation-specific. He chooses suffering with the people of God *rather than* the fleshpots of Egypt (v. 25). He was not afraid of the anger of the king (v. 27), but no praise is heaped on him as inherently brave,²³ and no mention is made of his many successful confrontations with Pharaoh (avoiding the rivaling magic tricks). The final act Moses performs in Hebrews 11 is keeping 'the Passover' and sprinkling the blood (v. 28). This sprinkling of the blood may be meant to evoke the blood Moses sprinkled on

22. B. Mack (*Wisdom and Hebrew Epic: Ben Sira's Hymn in Praise of the Fathers* [Chicago: University of Chicago, 1985]) names the reception of honor/rewards as one of the seven characteristics of the heroes on Sirach's list. The other six include: 1. designation of office; 2. mention of divine approbation or election; 3. reference to covenant; 4. mention of the person's character or piety; 5. an account of deeds; and 6. reference to the historical situation. Mack's work on Sirach 44-50 was one of the primary inspirations for my approach to Hebrews 11.

23. Statements about the hero's virtue or piety are often an integral part of the description. See Mack's list of characteristics in n. 22.

the people during the covenant ceremony in Exod. 24.8 and referred to in Heb. 9.21.²⁴ Thus, its mention is more evocative of the blood theme in the document overall than of any special qualities of Moses.

The biographical events that the author chooses to include about Moses portray him as an orphan, a defector, and a fugitive. Moses is not depicted as the leader of the people during the exodus. When the crossing at the Red Sea is mentioned in 11.29, we read 'By faith the people crossed the Red Sea. . .'. Indeed, none of Moses' actions as they are recounted in Hebrews 11 portray him as a leader of any kind.²⁵ Instead of being depicted as a man who leads the people out of bondage, he is a man who makes wise choices for himself.²⁶ By any Jewish standard of the time, this amounts to a grossly understated picture of Moses as hero.

What are missing in Hebrews' retelling of the Moses story are all of Moses' grand accomplishments, which on other hero lists and in other retellings, are co-extensive with rewards. Because in the author's version the rewards are delayed until some time which lies outside of biblical history, the saga of Moses not only seems incomplete, but Moses himself lacks honor, prestige, and achievement, as do all the heroes in Hebrews. It is not that the author of Hebrews is not paying Moses compliments, but his descriptions of Moses are restrained. While the tendency of hero lists is to be over-the-top, this author holds back.

This holding back is due to the fact that the heroes live in a time prior to the Christ event. Their heroism is not attributable to their achievements in their own time, but to their ability to anticipate a better time, when they will receive their reward (as vv. 25-26 read: 'Moses chose to suffer with the people of God rather than have the fleeting pleasure of sin, since he considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked to his reward'). The heroes of Hebrews function as seers who portend the future, but whose own heroic image is mitigated by their being part of the old world order.

24. For the purposes of typology, the author has an interest in conflating various ceremonies. For a discussion of the matter, see D'Angelo, *Moses in Hebrews*, pp. 244-48.

25. And yet Moses' leadership is mentioned earlier in Hebrews in connection with the people's rebelliousness in the wilderness: 'Was it not all those who left Egypt under the leadership of Moses?' (3.16). Thus, Moses is held at least partly responsible for the people's failures, but not given credit for their successes.

26. A. Culpepper, 'A Superior Faith: Hebrews 10:19-12:2', *RevExp* 82 (1985), p. 386.

Hebrews 11 participates in the attitude toward the biblical past which is typical of the document as a whole. The author consistently engages in a hermeneutic of continuity and discontinuity.²⁷ Like the levitical system of worship, the tabernacle, the Temple, the priests, or other biblical institutions, the author uses the heroes as historical examples for teaching, but at the same time devalues them because they are what make the old covenant *old*. The national realities of Israel, that is, the tabernacle, the Torah, and the priesthood, are only shadows of perfect divine realities (Heb. 8.5). They are both *models for*, as well as *models in contrast to*.²⁸

For example, on the one hand, the author makes a strong case for the inferiority of the levitical priesthood, while Christ, on the other hand, is the perfect priest. Christ is shown to be perfect by fulfilling the same needs that the levitical system was trying to fulfill, only he fulfills them perfectly and self-sufficiently. Thus the author allows the ancient Jewish system to set the standard: blood must be shed to expiate sin, the victim must be unblemished, and so forth. But Christ has achieved the perfect version of the standard. Therefore, Christ as priest is both continuous and discontinuous with the tradition. He is a superlative priest who is judged to be superlative by the ancient (and, presumably, inferior) standard of measure. He is unlike the former priests because he is infinitely better, and he is like them because he achieves their priestly goals. Similarly, the heroes of Hebrews represent models for the Christian audience to which Hebrews is directed, but they are also being implicitly contrasted with the ultimate hero: Jesus.²⁹

27. This idea comes from the work of G. Hughes, *Hebrews and Hermeneutics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1979).

28. There are several discussions of examples in rhetorical handbooks, and they reflect a sophisticated understanding of the different ways an example or model can function. Quintilian lists five types of examples: 1. the similar; 2. the dissimilar; 3. the contrary; 4. the greater-to-the-less; and 5. the lesser to the greater (*Inst. Orat.* 5.11.6-7). For an explanation and discussion of these, see B. Brice, 'Paradeigma and Exemplum in Ancient Rhetorical Theory' (PhD dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1975), pp. 158-63.

29. One should always remember that a historical example functions propagandistically. The description of an example from the past will always be colored by an interest in the present. See the influential article by S. Perlman, 'The Historical Example, its Use and Importance as Political Propaganda in the Attic Orators', *Scripta Hierosolymitana* (eds. A. Fuks and I. Halpern; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961), VII, pp. 150-66.

So much of the argument of Hebrews is devoted to distinguishing Jesus from others³⁰ that the author cannot risk the heroes' status being confused with that of Jesus. If Jesus is the perfect example of faith (12.2), the heroes must be something less. Furthermore, Jesus was not simply the Son of God, but he also had to suffer humiliation and shame (2.9; 4.15–5.8). Since the heroes of the old covenant cannot possess more glory than Jesus, the author's portrayal of them must somehow diminish their grand stature. In addition, because the author describes the heroes as humble in their own time, their image more closely matches the image of the earthly Jesus.

The alteration-of-status characteristic can also help us explain the author's waffling on the position of the heroes' reception of promises. Exegetes have often noted that the author contradicts himself in ch. 11.³¹ On the one hand, the author of Hebrews says that the heroes received neither earthly promises (v. 13)—meaning biblical promises like land and nationhood—nor did they receive the ultimate promise given in Christ (v. 39). On the other hand, sometimes the author says they did receive the biblical promises (v. 17, 33),³² and he certainly implies that they will receive the eschatological promise ultimately (v. 40). I account for this apparent contradiction by distinguishing between receiving a promise and receiving the fulfillment of the promise.³³ Thus, the author's position is as follows: the heroes were promised earthly rewards, but never actually received them. Conversely, God never directly promised them an eschatological reward, but they will presumably receive it.

What scholars have not adequately dealt with is how radical it is for the author to say that the biblical heroes did not receive what was promised them by God.³⁴ From a traditional point of view, such a statement would have been insulting. But for this author, the heroes' status

30. See esp. Heb. 1–2 and 3.1–6.

31. This observation has been used to argue that the author must be relying on a source. See Michel, *Der Brief*, p. 244. Cf. Ellingworth, *Hebrews*, pp. 558–59.

32. Cf. Heb. 6.15: 'When God made a promise to Abraham, because he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, saying, "I will surely bless you and multiply you"'. And thus Abraham, having patiently endured, obtained the promise.'

33. This is essentially the position of Bruce, *Epistle*, p. 343.

34. Even though the biblical text can legitimately be interpreted this way, e.g., for Abraham, Jewish exegetes contemporary with the author of Hebrews did not read the text in this light. For them, Abraham received all that was promised. See for example, CD 3.1–21; Sir. 44.19–21; and *Pirqe Aboth* 5.3.

is not derived from earthly rewards and accomplishments. Their heroic image depends upon other, more humble qualities.

Marginalization

Closely related to the characteristic of alteration-of-status is the characteristic of marginalization. It is the most fundamental quality that the heroes of Hebrews possess. Because the status of biblical heroes is traditionally derived from a position of leadership or connection with a national institution, and since the heroes' station must be altered so as not to outshine Jesus, the author's avoidance of mentioning national accomplishments serves both purposes.

The author of Hebrews depicts his heroes as separate from his/her contemporaries. The language of separation is self-evident in Abraham's case. Abraham lives in the promised land as in a foreign land (παρόκτισεν εἰς γῆν τῆς ἐπαγγελίας ὡς ἀλλοτρίαν; v. 9). Moses, too, voluntarily gives up his status within a nation or society (vv. 24–25). Both men are portrayed as loners.

Even though other characters on the list may not be such obvious outsiders, I think our author views them as outsiders and that this quality is essential. Abel, Enoch, and Noah stand apart from their generations. In other words, none of these men have any real compatriots, but are rather at odds with their contemporaries. Abel was murdered, while the progeny Cain and Seth populate the earth. Because of this event, Abel is taken out of earthly circulation, so to speak. Enoch was taken up and later tradition assumes that this event sets him completely apart from his peers.³⁵ Noah was saved while everyone else drowned. In the

35. Enoch is the first biblical hero to be mentioned in Sirach 44–50 (although Enoch's name was probably not originally in the Hebrew text; see Mack, *Wisdom and Hebrew Epic*, pp. 199–200); where he is said to have been set apart as an example to others: 'Enoch pleased the Lord, and was taken up; he was an example of repentance to all generations' (44.16). A similar sentiment is expressed by Philo in *Abr.* 17–18, where Philo explains that the word 'translation' (μεταθέσεως) found in the LXX implies a turning from a worse life to a better one. For further discussion, see D. Lührmann, 'Enoch und die Metanoia', *ZNW* 66 (1975), pp. 103–16. Finally, the best expression of Enoch as an elect one who was separated from his generation can be found in Wis. 4.10–16: 'There was one who pleased God and was loved by him, and while living among sinners he was taken up. He was caught up lest evil change his understanding or guile deceive his soul. For the fascination of wickedness obscures what is good, and roving desire perverts the innocent mind. . . . The righteous man who has died will condemn the ungodly who are living, and youth that is quickly

case of each of these heroes, their contemporaries were in a depraved or at least sinful state, while the heroes somehow transcend that depravity.³⁶ Finally, Rahab, with whom the list culminates, stands apart from her community of origin as well. Thus, the heroes of Hebrews are not distinguished by their comrades, as is the case in the Sirach list, they are distinguished from them, and are eventually removed from life with them by God.

Perhaps the best way to measure how far the heroes stand from their traditional place within Israel is to consider what the author avoids saying in his descriptions of the heroes. For example, three of the men named constitute a special class of heroes. Noah, Abraham, and Moses each made a covenant with God. Yet, the author does not acknowledge the covenants made with any of them. Covenants, like the rewards, play a major role in the Hellenistic hero lists, but in Hebrews they are absent.

Surely at least part of the reason the author avoids the mention of covenants is because they are inherently tied up with Israel's national identity. The defining characteristic of Israel's relationship with God is the covenant. Since the author wishes to stay clear of national accomplishments, it makes sense that he would not mention covenants. The covenants are also a traditional sign of status and were usually connected with holding national office. They also imply theophonic contact between the deity and the individual, which the author may have wanted to avoid, because Jesus in Hebrews is the intermediary *par excellence*. Thus, it is not surprising for the author to avoid mention of covenants.

Perhaps the author wished to avoid references to God's covenant with Israel because he thought it would not be well received by a Gentile, or partially Gentile, audience. Josephus downplays the covenant in the *Antiquities*, while stressing that Israel is a virtuous people deserving of God's special attention.³⁷ But Moses in Hebrews does not possess those characteristics that would typically appeal to a non-Jewish audience

perfectured will condemn the prolonged old age of the unrighteous man' (RSV).

36. For an overview of the multifarious traditions about the depraved state of the earth during primeval times, see L. Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (7 vols.; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1937), I, pp. 103-41.

37. H. Attridge (*The Interpretation of Biblical History in the Antiquitates Judaicae of Flavius Josephus* [Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976], p. 148), speculates that the theme of covenant is diminished in any setting where Gentiles are included.

either. Among Gentiles Moses was known either as a legislator or as a magician.³⁸ Neither is referred to in Hebrews 11.

If we use Moses as an example once again, we can further illustrate Hebrews' unique portrayal of the hero. Compared to those in Hebrews, depictions of the great leader in other texts—even New Testament texts—look completely different. For example, while Stephen's speech in Acts is not a hero list, it does rehearse the great events of biblical history while highlighting the works of heroes. In Acts 7 we find everything said of Moses that we expect to find: God speaks to him on Mt Sinai and he leads the people through the Red Sea. Stephen even says '[Moses] received living oracles to give to us' (Acts 7.38). Thus a note is made of the revelation given to Moses and the fact that this revelation is to be handed down. In fact, several direct quotations of God speaking to Moses appear in Acts 7, while in Hebrews 11 Moses is not the recipient of any revelation,³⁹ and does not act as the lawgiver for the people. The author's omission of these key biographical events indicates that he wishes to avoid the portrayal of Moses as a national hero; Moses is no longer a founding father of Israel.

The heroes of Hebrews are marginalized individuals. Instead of being viewed as leaders, as the center of Israelite society, they stand outside it. It is no surprise then that the list culminates with Rahab, a Gentile woman.

Transvaluation

In the words of the literary critic Gérard Genette, the author has *transvalued* the heroes of Jewish Scripture.⁴⁰ Transvaluing occurs when the characters in the hypertext (viz. the derivative text, which in this case is the LXX) acquire roles and attributes derived from a system of values not found in the hypotext (viz. the targeted text, which in this case is Hebrews).⁴¹ In other words, when the author of Hebrews

38. J. Gager, *Moses in Greco-Roman Paganism* (SBLMS, 16; Nashville and New York: Abingdon Press, 1972).

39. Moses does, however, receive a direct revelation in Heb. 8.5.

40. G. Genette, *Palimpsestes: La littérature au second degré* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1982). I am grateful to Dennis MacDonald for introducing me to Genette's work. MacDonald's own work (*Christianizing Homer: The Odyssey, Plato, and the Acts of Andrew* [New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994]) is indebted to Genette.

41. MacDonald, *Christianizing Homer*, p. 6.

composed his miniature re-writing of biblical history in ch. 11, the primary objects of his narrative, that is, the heroes, were transformed by the values of the author. An implicit part of transvaluing is the intentional *devaluing* of the system of values perceived to be originally present in the hypertext. Transvaluing would not be successful if the new values were just added to the text; they must replace the old ones—hence the old ones are devalued so that the audience will reject them. Thus, the author diminishes the heroes' national status in order to highlight aspects of their careers that better reflect his Christian perspective.

The author's understanding of Christology and the new covenant as well as his experience of being a Christian cause him to value the heroes of the Jewish Bible for reasons different from those that had traditionally been employed. National leaders become marginal individuals. A man like Abraham, famous for his power and wealth, is transformed into a wanderer who never received his rightful inheritance. Moses, the hero of the exodus and Israel's lawgiver, is included in Hebrews not for any of those reasons, but because he suffered as an outsider.

The heroes in Hebrews 11 are not primarily examples of virtuous behavior, except in the most general way. The sheer variety of actions ascribed to the heroes makes it difficult to see what behavior is being prescribed or praised. Each hero or event is listed as part of the ancient history of the Hebrews community, existing in an inferior world without the benefit of Christ. Yet, even in this world heroes emerged and heroic events happened through faith. This being established, how much easier is it for the Christian community, which has the benefit of Christ, to have the confidence to abide in faith—that is, to stay the divine course on which they presently travel. Thus, the heroes are an inspiration to the Christian audience because they did so well with so little.

These images of the biblical heroes have both positive and negative functions as examples or models. On the one hand, the author's hermeneutic of discontinuity is evident in the devaluing of the heroes' actual heroism. They lack achievement, high status, and reward. Like examples from Graeco-Roman lists, the heroes of Hebrews are more human than those typically found on Jewish lists.⁴² On this level the heroes function as models of contrast with Christ and life in the new covenant. On the other hand, the author's hermeneutic of continuity functions in

that the heroes are models for the new Christian community. Obedience in suffering since the advent of Christ is valued as a sign of high station and not humility, and being an outsider among one's own people need not be a source of shame. The catalogue of heroes in Hebrews reflects a Christian writer who saw the heroes of Jewish Scripture as quintessentially Christian, rather than Jewish.

The Denationalization of Biblical History

Hebrews 11 constitutes what I call a multi-dimensional list. By that I mean that a variety of persons and events appear. (I also include in this category the lists in Covenant of Damascus 2–3, Wisdom 10, and Sirach 44–50.) Identifying this category serves to contrast this kind of list with what I would call a flat or one-dimensional list, in which one particular virtue or type of behavior is illustrated (Graeco-Roman hero lists are almost always of this type). The multi-dimensional nature of a list often indicates that the author was striving for broad coverage of biblical events, so as to better convey the *story* of biblical history—and that is what I think we have in Hebrews. What is most important about the diachronic aspect of the text is that it amounts to a narrative genealogy which functions to legitimate the community addressed by the text.

Because the author concludes the list the way he does ('And all these, although attested to through faith, did not receive the promise, since God foresaw something better for us, so that *they* would not be perfected apart from *us*') the heroes form the ancestral heritage of the community. 'They' meaning the heroes, and 'us' meaning the community, are part of the same story. Hebrews 11 implicitly functions as a genealogy which legitimates the Christian audience by providing them with a biblical ancestry. At the same time, this ancestry is not identified with the nation of Israel, but forms a trajectory independent of it. That is why the list does not include any priests or kings.⁴³ All the heroes are outsiders. They stand apart from the national history of Israel while at the same time being recorded in Scripture, which is the collection of documents traditionally assumed to contain the story of Israel.⁴⁴ In the author's words, the heroes derive their status from

43. David is only mentioned in the summary allusions (11.32), and not as part of the main list.

44. J. A. Sanders (*Torah and Canon* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972]) makes the point that Scripture was primarily thought of as *story* by the ancients.

42. See Eisenbaum, 'Jewish Heroes', pp. 92-95, 99-102.

πίστις, not from any national role or office. πίστις in this sense is not so much a personal quality, as it is a divine force (perhaps analogous to the Holy Spirit?). πίστις allows the author to establish a non-national, salvation-historical trajectory which includes the Hebrews community.

Effectively, the author's purpose is to *denationalize* the history of Israel. To accomplish this, his task was necessarily two-fold. First, he had to show that the heroes were superior individuals because of non-national accomplishments. Those who are typically thought of as national leaders, like Abraham and Moses, are not depicted in their leadership roles. Furthermore, Abraham and Moses, like the others listed, are treated as distinct from the people or nation. Secondly, he implicitly engages in a polemic against those who would see Scripture as a national history by ending the bulk of his summary just before the establishment of the nation, and by giving the impression that Israel's history dissipates—that is, has no teleological direction—just as she enters what is truly her national phase. Thus, God's promises, which in biblical history are traditionally nationalistic—promises for land, temple, and monarchy—are depicted as not having been fulfilled, in order that a new ending might be grafted onto the story: the heavenly rest now attainable because of Christ (vv. 39-40; cf. Heb. 4.6-11). Indeed, Abraham and Moses are the paradigmatic heroes in Hebrews 11 precisely because they do not receive the fulfillment of those national promises.

It is difficult to imagine an ancient Jewish writer making the remark about the lack of fulfillment of biblical promises, because it represents a perspective so far removed from the traditional laudatory view of the biblical figures.⁴⁵ But from the author's transvalued conception, it is a compliment to the heroes, because they will receive a greater promise—the Christian promise. Thus, while most scholars have seen Hebrews 11 as a rather conventional recounting of biblical history, I see it as an innovative Christian reading of that history.

45. What I mean by this statement is that while there may have been a variety of Jewish beliefs and practices in the first century, most Jews would acknowledge the biblical heroes as the recipients of fulfilled promises. I simply want to draw attention to the unusual perspective of the writer of Hebrews. Cf. Windisch (*Hebräerbrief*, p. 98) who like many other commentators misses the radical (and rather 'unJewish') reading of Jewish heroes and history in Hebrews 11: 'Bis auf den övetδισμὸς Χριστοῦ und die Schlußbemerkung 39f könnte der ganze Abschnitt von einem Juden entworfen sein. Zum mindesten liegt eine jüdische oder judenchristliche Schultradition zugrunde.'