

On the Notion of Exile

Recently I had come across an entry in Henry David Thoreau's **Journal** which he prefaced with "to Fairhaven 2am." The time of year was mid November when obviously it was quite cold. Always I had suspected that his not uncommon, pithy mention of such an ungodly hour was inserted tongue-in-cheek along with a touch of humor. I have no real evidence, just a hunch. Probably Thoreau was taunting his readers, that they are missing something very special. We'll never know for sure, but these entries are intriguing. We can just imagine Thoreau rising in the dead of night and making his way through the woods to favorite spots along the Concord River such as Fairhaven. He had frequented them many times, so they were easy to access, even at night. Thoreau then proceeds to describe the late autumnal night atmosphere in his usual eloquent terms. It almost...but not quite...makes you want to crawl out of bed and join him.

These early morning entries between one and three o'clock are not isolated but more frequent than at first glance regardless of the time of year. I could understand getting out of bed during the spring or summer, but in the dead of a New England winter? You wonder what exactly was Thoreau's motivation as well as what he did during the rest of the day (and night). Superficially one could write him off as an eccentric bachelor living alone. After all, married people don't behave like this, and his contemporaries were aware of the native stranger in their midst. Thoreau doesn't describe the "why" of his walks which adds to both the appeal and mystery of his **Journal**. Regardless, his entries endure and inspire. We all might entertain such thoughts but seldom see them through. However, we can join Thoreau vicariously as he tramps about the woods both night and day as well as at other seasons of the year, all four being quite pronounced in his native New England. We have to remember, too, that Concord was no wilderness, fairly well established and dotted with numerous farms. That gives his entries a certain tameness and makes him closer to home for us moderns. Thus Thoreau is an at-home adventurer in places taken for granted by others.

Thoreau is well known today as a man who thought for himself and did not live conventionally, a fact his neighbors were aware of. It is to their credit that these hard-working Yankees didn't harass him but left him alone to do his thing even when he lived like a hermit by Walden Pond for a couple of years. This attitude remains alive and well in central and western parts of Massachusetts where many people out in the country and smaller towns are pretty much free-thinkers. Having read almost all Thoreau's writing over the years but favoring the **Journal**, his largest though perhaps least known work, I get the impression that while a native Concordian and son of New England to the core, never did he feel at home. Except for a few trips to places like New York and further afield to the upper Midwest, Thoreau rarely strayed from his backyard. This ability to stay put is even more remarkable in the pre-Civil War years when the West was opening up and many were migrating there, the Gold Rush and all that. He preferred to explore his own backyard and notes in **Walking**:

I have met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of Walking, that is, of taking walks—who had a genius, so to speak, for sauntering, which word is beautifully derived 'from idle people who roved about the country, in the Middle Ages, and asked charity, under pretense of going a la Sainte Terre,' to

the Holy Land, till the children exclaimed, 'There goes a Sainte-Terrer,' a Saunterer, a Holy-Lander. They who never go to the Holy Land in their walks, as they pretend, are indeed mere idlers and vagabonds; but they who do go there are saunterers in the good sense, such as I mean. Some, however, would derive the word from sans terre without land or a home, which, therefore, in the good sense, will mean, having no particular home, but equally at home everywhere. For this is the secret of successful sauntering. He who sits still in a house all the time may be the greatest vagrant of all; but the saunterer, in the good sense, is no more vagrant than the meandering river, which is all the while sedulously seeking the shortest course to the sea.

Recently I had searched both the **Journal** and **Walking** for specific references to the term "exile" but couldn't find any except for one. However, this concept permeates his writings through and through and is summed up in the telling words "I ask myself therefore how I am to lose the habit of exile from which springs all my sufferings."¹ This gives insight into the man who never was really happy but had a tinge of permanent sadness, of not being fully at home, despite his incredible appreciation of his surroundings and admiration for local farmers. If Thoreau were alive today, he'd admit it was easier to be an exile during his own time compared with today's fast-paced society. Even while by Walden Pond, he made frequent visits to friends and family as well as inviting people to his cabin. Such is one tell-tale sign of his sense of exile which in this instance was heightened but not developed as such. This double-life, if you will, might make him suspicious in the eyes of some readers just like Thomas Merton who wrote eloquently about solitude but was a highly gregarious monk. At the same time, I'm not sure whether Thoreau was fully conscious of being an exile except for the isolated quote in this paragraph. If it came out consciously, he may have felt the need to leave the Concord area and join the migration to the West in order to get away from it all. Then again, he may have been reluctant to admit the fact, his somewhat ornery temperament getting in the way. In the end, it seems to be a not readily acknowledged sense of dependency. This ambiguity seen in one man who lived some one hundred and fifty years ago therefore strikes a sympathetic cord in us moderns.

Thoreau apart, what is this notion of exile about which, despite the perils involved, continues to intrigue us? Certainly many experience it today throughout the world both due to displacement by war and in search of better economic conditions. The latter seeks escape from poverty to (hopefully) a better life and differs from exile though can include it, but this is too this-worldly for our purposes. Even more, it is very un-Thoreauvian. Then we have prisoners who are confined due to some criminal offense against society. They too don't fall under the category of an exile though some may develop it in prison to the advantage of personal growth. Thus the common opinion about exile remains, namely, that a person, even an entire nation, has been removed forcibly from his or its native home and yearns to return there. This can happen with migrants though to a lesser degree. Once in a new land, they prefer abiding there instead of returning to their native land. At this point a person has turned his back on his former home and moves forward in the new one. No longer is he a migrant, let alone an exile, but a native.

When it comes to things spiritual, Judaism and Christianity seem to be the only two religions which have the theme of exile running through them. In short, both have a strong political element within their traditions which intersects with their respective histories. The reality of being an exile was painfully frequent for Israel and permeates her history right from the beginning with the first man's expulsion from the garden of Eden. From there

¹ I don't recall the source of this quote, having jotted it down somewhere prior to writing this article.

it continues throughout various stages of Israel's history though not once does it appear in the Book of Exodus. Jacob's descendants migrated to Egypt due to famine because Joseph became second in command within that country, and some four hundred years later his descendants migrated back to their original homeland. So apart from the Eden story, the theme of exile doesn't appear until much later or once Israel got foothold in Canaan through the person of Abraham. The Hebrew verbal root (very important in that language) for exile is *galah* which means to make naked, to uncover, to reveal. Though it may diverge somewhat from the sense in which *galah* is used, we could say that when going into exile, one's true nature is made manifest. That has been true throughout Israel's many exiles, times when prophets played an important role of explaining why they ended up as they did. And so, upon looking back upon their experiences, people could claim they were at their best during these times of the hardship. "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and wept when we remembered Zion" [Ps 137.1].

Much later came the Roman occupation when Israel went into even a deeper form of exile despite not leaving her native soil, at least not at first. It culminated with the destruction of Jerusalem in the year seventy when Israel ceased to exist, and Jews scattered throughout the Mediterranean world never to return until the twentieth century. In later centuries they expanded to Eastern Europe, Africa and North America. Shortly before the so-called Diaspora in 70 AD Jesus Christ was born, and the religion that sprang from him took over the concept of exile though the Gospels don't used the actual word; the same applies with Paul's epistles. The First Letter of Peter has three specific references which is about it. Surely the persecutions that followed must have contributed because Christians didn't seem to belong to this world, and persecutors were more than happy to send them elsewhere. Hebrews mentions "exile" once and perhaps represents the most eloquent description in the Bible when the author recalls heroes and heroines of the faith in Chapter Eleven. It is summed up in vs.13, "Having acknowledged they were strangers and exiles on the earth." Because of the importance of this chapter, notations upon it lifted from another document on this home page form a fairly lengthy appendix. It is worth reading through to get a biblical and specifically Christian view on early reflections about being an exile. Surely Hebrews must have had a lot to do with inspiring the first monks who exiled themselves voluntarily into deserts and monasteries. To go into that, however, is another story not pertinent to the essay at hand.

We could say that the lengthy and venerable concept of exile started with the banishment from the garden of Eden. Actually the first chronological reference, if you will, occurs in 2Sam 15.19 which pertains to Ittai the Gittite, a non-Israelite. So if we are to take the biblical record literally, a considerable amount of time had passed between the Eden incident and the incident pertaining to Ittai in Second Samuel. Then there's the important forty years of wandering in the desert after Israel had left Egypt; again, it is not explicitly formulated as an exile. Perhaps it's because the people were forming gradually into a unified nation under the new Mosaic law. Throughout much of Israel's history—especially with the birth of Abram—there was a concerted search to establish a permanent homeland. That, in turn, involves unstable and unpredictable circumstances where the prospect of being sent into exile was always present. Unfortunately, both are inexorably bound together. What makes going into exile particularly difficult for Israel throughout her history is the concept of "land." It is more than a place on which to live but a sacred spot with a special relationship with God. To be removed forcibly from it is the worst of all misfortunes. Such is the meaning of *erets*, translated as "land." A verse from the Book of Daniel brings this out nicely: "(Daniel) went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem; and he got down upon his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God" [6.10]. Furthermore, exile

is always collective for Israel. While individuals may undergo it, the true significance of exile pertains to the nation as a whole.² In many instances, however, a physical connection remained with the exiles and *'erets*. Take, for example, references to the poorest of the poor, usually farmers and the like, being left behind who mind *'erets* during the exile the nation is undergoing. The conquerors could hardly care about them; they overlooked the vital fact that they had become caretakers of *'erets* until the nation returned.³

Centuries later Jesus Christ arrived on the scene whose words about an immediate return excited the early church. It was only natural to think this way, he was so up-front about it. If his words were true, why continue with the normal tasks of everyday life? Everyone was sharing in the life style of Noah prior to the flood. Later Jesus' words were reconsidered, yet the belief that he would return remains essential to an understanding of Christianity. Apart from any theological views or misinterpretations of them, people were divided as they are now roughly into two camps: enjoy life now, filling it with as much delight as possible despite its fleetingness. That differs radically from living sparingly because as Hebrews 11.13 says, we are "strangers and exiles on the earth." The latter sentiment does not necessarily belong to persons of a religious nature though often it does. Regardless, every person is aware of his mortality at one point or another. What to do with it is one of life's major tasks. That's why this essay began with Thoreau's 2am jaunt to Fairhaven. It offers a clue into how one man handled time in light of his mortality. While we could take this as a sign of being an exile, at the same time going to Fairhaven in the dead of night has a sense of being at home, albeit temporarily. As for this sense of mortality, it was with us from the beginning of human history but in recent decades was banished to nursing homes and hospitals. And so today mortality is something we have no direct experience of apart from violence in the media. Still, awareness of one's limited time of existence remains in the background, always threatening. That's unfortunate from the literary point of view, if you will. Some of the best literature was produced with first-hand encounters with death.

Although the last paragraph touched upon human mortality, this Ultimate Wall does not necessarily heighten the sense of being in exile. To possess it means (getting back to ancient Israel as *'erets*) that you have a keen sense of what home is about. Abram left his native *'erets* for an unknown one God pointed out to him; despite his fidelity, efforts as establishing a new *'erets* were tenuous. Reading about his wanderings (though they were within a relatively confined area) can be depressing since his frustration is compounded as to one divine promise after another, all not finding resolution. The words of Gen 25.8 ('Abraham breathed his last') are suggestive of this irresolution and what became a permanent state of being in exile. Abraham's immediate descendants carried this a step further. A severe famine forced his family to take refuge within Egypt which ended upon being a four hundred years residency. All indications are they were happy there, a fact usually not acknowledged except when

² It may be noted in passing that married folks don't have a feel for exile since they are preoccupied with their families.

³ It was just noted that the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD resulted in the diaspora. Surely some Jews remained in Israel, but they had to wait a very long time for the nation to resurrect itself. Both they and the majority scattered abroad were exiles in the fullest sense, of having no *'erets* of their own.

the Israelites complained bitterly to Moses in the desert during their wandering about how well their lives had been, even as slaves. Not once do we hear that Egypt had been a place of exile. It was only towards the end of their sojourn when Pharaoh turned his wrath against them that suddenly the Israelites felt like foreigners. That must have hit them especially hard after having been in one place for four centuries. However, it had the advantage of waking them up to the fact that although Egypt had been a long-term sanctuary, never did it become Israel's *'erets*. The Israelites felt it as well as the Egyptians, a tension always laying beneath the surface. Next came the forty year period of wandering in the Sinai wilderness which in Christian theology became an archetype of spiritual exile followed by gradual repossession of Canaan or their former homeland. Later in history the Lord would remind the Israelites of that wandering, a kind of ideal situation when they had direct access to him. Surely the more immediate descendants after Moses must have felt the eerie presence of their ancestors in Canaan, especially Abraham, as he moved from place to place without any final resolution. Would the same happen to them? If so, would Egypt be gracious to them as with Joseph?

These brief reflections upon what it means to be an exile are part and parcel of our Judeo-Christian heritage. The word itself conjures up negative thoughts and emotions, but it doesn't have to be this way. In fact, the notion of exile may have greater application today, given our highly mobile and urbanized society. To live namelessly in a city is very different from the Israelites wandering around Sinai for forty years...not the urban-desert contrast but the one between living alone and living collectively. You'd never pick up the feel of being in exile out in the suburbs because emphasis there is upon the family but as individual units largely isolated from other family units. Suburban life has been commented upon and satirized perhaps more than any form of modern living. Despite these assaults, still it remains an attractive ideal for many people. Surely a modern day exile would have a grand time spoofing that life style.

While reading entries such as "to Fairhaven 2am" from Thoreau's **Journal**, we get an indirect sense of exile but one undertaken willingly, not coerced. Perhaps that contributes to why Thoreau never has been so popular as today. Instinctively people pick up on the way he articulates life and nature (loneliness can be part of exile). He didn't belong to a group like the Israelites but lived on the outskirts of a fairly cohesive society as Concord which consisted of farmers on the threshold of the Industrial Revolution. It was as though Thoreau divined the future alienation of modern society, accepted it and used it to his advantage.⁴ During his meandering in the Concord area he must have been fully aware of America's expansion to the West and felt tugs in that direction. Actually Thoreau stood midway between the generations of the Revolutionary War and the Civil War yet managed to find a home amidst this era of transition. It is to his credit that Thoreau never caved in but remained in his neighborhood. Actually to travel far afield wouldn't have been his style. You pick this up in **Walden** when despite living in his cabin, he made frequent trips to his family home. The grandeur of the West would have overwhelmed Thoreau and detract him from the cozy yet semi-wild environment found in his own backyard. As for the West which must have been the talk of the town, Thoreau was fascinated by that direction, so much so that somewhere in the **Journal** he refuses to take hikes to the west due to its sacredness. The reason? The sunset draws you to it whereas sunrise comes to you without effort⁵ (even a city dweller can appreciate this).

⁴ See his frequent references to the railroad passing through town, of how he sang the praises of this new invention which he took advantage of readily to extend his excursions such as his walk to the top of Mount Monadnock in New Hampshire.

Intimately bound up with the west and sunset is the sense of sight which Thoreau favored in order to obtain a perspective on distance. It is an important means of appreciating one's relationship to where you are and to where you want to go; i.e., it's one of orientation. While Thoreau favored the west (later autumn through winter are among his best entries for it), he could employ the east to the west's advantage. For example, the golden light of a winter sunset is reflective in westward facing windows as in mirrors, giving the impression that the houses are ablaze. You can appreciate such a sight only when alone, for describing it to another person who might accompanying you detracts from the overall experience. Here is where the sense of being in exile is transformed into a positive experience. You know the sun is setting rapidly, that night is approaching and soon the fleeting experience will vanish. At the same time you're drawn by some indescribable yearning toward the setting sun, wanting to go with it beyond the western horizon. Then there's the issue of what happens after sunset if you can't make the trip beyond the horizon. You're stuck in the place of your yearning. Fortunately the stars emerge signaling all is fine, that you should take comfort in being in exile instead of being upset over it, and that everything will come to a happy end. You can't go further than that, really. Apart from the stars saying that your exile is equivalent to being at home, sounds in the night take on an added significance, obviously because the sense of sight is blunted. Sudden, unexpected sounds (human or otherwise), especially those in the distance, assume greater meaning. They have a certain "vain" character insofar as they take place under the starry sky against the back-drop of darkness' anonymity. Instead of being threatening, such sounds contribute to being at home in exile. Not only that, their suddenness and mysterious character contribute to a sense of humor, that they are uttered in vain compared to the clarity of day and are transitory.⁶

These reflections have value insofar as they suggest one way of countering a pressing human dilemma, how to handle free time, of what to do once you've done everything that is necessary. We could say Thoreau found himself in that predicament and made the best of it. Modern man can't stand being idle, hanging around with nothing to do. Even if he has finished with his responsibilities and finds nothing else to do, he'll discover a way to keep himself busy. Surely a sign that one isn't at home but in exile, an exile which is torturous, never marked by rest. One is living, as it were, constantly on guard and watching your back. When at home, you're in your natural environment and feel the need to go nowhere else. That drive to engage in uninterrupted activity or incessantly being in motion has vanished. If you're in motion, you're going somewhere, and as common experience dictates, going is better than arriving and hence more fun than being stuck at home. So the question of making a transition from being in exile to being at home is a question of making a transition from being in motion to being at rest. And being at rest is akin to the final transition into death. The task at hand is to reverse this natural way of thinking, a seemingly impossible task. The chief enemy is perceived as inertia, of gravity always tending downward to a state of rest, whereas it should become an ally, the means of getting us to where we belong.⁷

5 "Westward is heaven, or rather heavenward is the west. The way to heaven is from east to west round the earth. The sun leads and shows it. The stars, too, light it." **Journal**, February 27, 1851. Elsewhere in this home page is a list of references to sunset in the **Journal**, very interesting in itself.

6 Spring and summer have the same essential ingredients. However, those seasons are too busy.

7 This downward motion to rest isn't the same as entropy because once at rest...at home...you find yourself being grateful for having made this most pleasant discovery. Thus a spirit of gratitude is the ideal remedy for entropy, if I may put it this way.

By no means does modern man have a monopoly on this restlessness which had been endemic throughout history, only today it has assumed new form. An interesting example from the Bible is Noah who appears on the scene not long after Adam's banishment from the garden of Eden. For no apparent reason he "found favor in the eyes of the Lord" [Gen 6.7]...not because of any innate quality but something akin to a random choice on God's part. Someone had to be chosen which implies a subtle hint of humor where God is rummaging around humanity until he hit upon this fellow. Thus Noah didn't differ much from his contemporaries as he went about his business as best he could. But shortly before the Lord called Noah we read "the wickedness of man was great in the earth" [vs. 5]. That meant Noah was less susceptible to this wickedness which made him stand out in an awkward, noticeable fashion. That's one side benefit of the divine order to build an ark: nobody would pay Noah serious attention. We don't have any direct reason for humanity's wickedness except the murder of Abel by Cain which occurred shortly after the first man's banishment from Eden. Then later the "sons of God" [6.2] married men which seemed behind the impetus for the Lord to seek humanity's destruction. Apparently these sons had disobeyed him just like the first woman, and to repeat this disobedience at the hands of heavenly descendants was intolerable. Anyway, this is the background against which Noah's life is led; in everything identical to his fellows except for behaving wickedly. There came a time for Noah when feeling out of place must have blossomed into a full-grown awareness that he didn't belong and had to escape somewhere, somehow. The ark provided the perfect escape route but not what he had in mind. In sum, Noah's disillusionment grew into knowledge that he was an exile in his own home and among his own people.

A chief characteristic of Noah's contemporaries (and this is apart from the wickedness involved in the Genesis tale) is the perception of normalcy they enjoyed which later prompted Jesus Christ to observe "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage" [Mt 24.37]. Jesus doesn't seem to condemn the wickedness of Noah's generation (all generations essentially are the same); rather, he is focusing upon contemporary normalcy which goes unquestioned, and that seems the point of separation between those people and Noah. The Lord takes advantage of Noah's sense of exile by driving him to build an ark. That vessel constructed in the middle of the desert far from water becomes the means by which Noah will leave his place of exile for a renewed place of home. However, there was a lengthy transition period when Noah had to float upon the water over the earth before arriving back upon it. Obviously the Lord had in mind the future of the human race which is why he took into the ark Noah's wife, three sons and their wives. Not a word is uttered as to being of the same character of Noah. Instead, they seemed pretty much contaminated like the rest of pre-flood humanity only less so in order to survive for the propagation of humanity.⁸ Nothing more is worth mentioning of them except for this strictly biological function. We know from reading more of Genesis that the pre-flood contamination of humanity wasn't halted but continued, for the next major incident was erection of the tower of Babel which resulted in the confusion of language, a sign of further exile from the Lord. Reading these stories with their ups and downs are depressingly familiar, for the same theme runs through them all. That's intentional, to put it inaccurately, but enough to drill home the fact that human life as we know it is marked by a profound sense of exile.

Common to both Noah and his contemporaries are the basic human enterprises which exist today, especially

⁸ Noah's sons are mentioned by name but not his wife...as though she were unworthy of mention.

survival and propagation of the race. In and by themselves these are neutral. It's the intent with which they are pursued that makes the difference. So while Noah was growing up pretty much like his fellows, he had a sense of having "found favor" or *chen* with the Lord which somehow made him feel different though not superior to people around him. That means he went about making a living, but the almost uneasy feeling of having been set apart put him on a collision course with the rest of humanity. So while growing up and later getting married, Noah found comfort in stories about his ancestors, a relatively short period of time stemming back to Adam. Among them, Enoch must have caught his attention, the one who "walked with God; and he was not, for God took him" [Gen 5.24]. Somehow if not literally Noah knew he was destined to imitate him. In fact, he had a premonition this was certain, but the means by which he'd be transported out of the world remained to be seen. So while in exile, Noah comforted himself with stories that had built up around Enoch. Stories handed down by Adam, the first man, were fresher in men's collective memory despite their wickedness. Projecting even further back, there were stories formulated by Adam about the seven days of creation, of how all this commenced "in the beginning." He was right there in the garden and got a word-for-word account from God himself. These were stories vital to recall as faithfully as possible that they may offer hope yet underneath they bespoke something ominous was about to happen. When the commission came from on high to build an ark big enough to contain a pair of all animals under the sun, it involved calamitous results for humanity. While Noah and his immediate family were to board the ark with these animals, we hear nothing of mankind's collective heritage...scrolls, for example. Society at the time was founded upon oral tradition, so Noah must have consulted the oldest living people he could discover in order to mine their memories. He must have asked his sons and wives to do likewise.

While we're not called to build an ark in the middle of the desert, the story of Noah makes us wonder how we are to comport ourselves among people in whom God's "spirit shall not abide forever" [Gen 6.3]. Hopefully this won't involve the destruction of the human race as it did in Noah's time. Or to put it more practically, what are we to do when in exile? Acting like those of Noah's generation is a dead-end, and that can be applied to every generation since (including those from Adam to Noah and from him to the tower of Babel story and beyond, to Abram). Thus it is symbolic of the human condition, of people knowing their life spans are limited yet simultaneously squander their resources. Those closest to Noah may not have been as evil as the others, but they were no exemplars, a fact which pretty much isolates the man. Outwardly Noah did adapt by marrying and giving in marriage as Jesus observed much later, but that's as far as he could go on the natural plane. At the same time Noah must have been an excellent husband and father, keeping them close together and isolated from other people in order to minimize influence from the surrounding culture. People knew this and left him alone because of their own preoccupations which is why he could construct an enormous ark without people asking why. Noah's superficial sense of normalcy and conformity thus became a cover under which he could carry out the divine intention hiding, as the expression goes, in plain sight.

The superficial normalcy just noted can be thought of as kind of praxis, of comporting oneself not in a deliberately deceitful manner but in a way to shield the virtue within you. This virtue is something you realize fully isn't your own but has another source. Maybe that's where Noah stood out so starkly. He had no part in the intermarriage of the sons of God described above. His wife, if you will, was one of the last to be so contaminated by that intercourse which made her a suitable companion...more as a person with less wickedness than her contemporaries. Surely in private they must have discussed the results of this union between divine and human beings was

developing, of how all these unions produced a result far from what God would have desired. The other preoccupation both had was to canvass the neighborhood and surrounding areas to acquire all the available knowledge they could find. That's where the three sons and their wives came in. Neither Noah nor his wife could effect this, so they sent out these six people on an urgent mission. Those whom they asked weren't a bit concerned about why; they were too preoccupied with their evil. Noah and his family figured that they could share this information among themselves once on board the ark, constantly repeating information among themselves so as to transmit orally to future generations. That's the hidden story of Noah, if you will, for it can be taken more as a tale of physical survival. Dedication to preserving one's culture is more important than mere survival.

Then there's the problem of what Noah did after the flood because he lived three hundred and fifty years (cf. Gen 9.28), quite a long time to be upon the newly purged earth. Because the generations before the flood were so abominably wicked, in no way did Noah undertake amateur archaeological work to see if he could recover remnants of the past. It had nothing of value to contribute to the new order of things. However, the corrupting influence remained in his three sons and their wives which begat it to the next generation and so forth. No small wonder that Noah decided to get drunk on the vineyard he had planted. Not even an all encompassing flood could blot out the wickedness he had left and the wickedness that lay in store. So while Noah cultivated his vineyards, he looked on in amazement at the initial seeds of evil being propagated and wondered if he should have perished many years earlier instead of entering the ark. On the larger scale, this stubborn persistence of evil so early in human history has a comforting side to it. Although never can we rid ourselves of it, just keep it in check at best, our heightened sense of vulnerability at doing so increases our awareness of being in exile. Then automatically, almost miraculously, that vulnerability translates into strength. You have your back up against the wall with nowhere to go which compels you to face the evil head on which is impossible on your own strength. At this point something wonderful kicks into action and like Noah, we are rescued from the flood.

This lengthy discourse on Noah is important because he had experienced two experiences of exile: the pre-flood years when he was a loner among his generation and the post-flood years when the prospects of the same fate confronted him. Only this second time it was made worse by his own family having retained contamination from the before the flood. The human race would have to wait two sets of generations in Genesis Ten and Eleven interrupted by the tower of Babel. Then a "second Noah" would appear in the person of Abram whose descendants continued up to Jesus Christ who alone was able to cure that sense of exile. And so this is a good place as any to conclude though our sense of being in exile remains until death.

Appendix: Notes on Chapter Eleven of Hebrews

As noted above, this chapter is excerpted from another document on the Lectio Divina Home Page. It presents the best biblical view on the notion of an exile, combining elements from both the Old and New Testaments.

Vs. 1: Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Two elements which comprise *faith* (pistis):

1) *assurance* (hupostasis): for another sense, cf. 1.1: “He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his *nature*.” This noun suggests something “under” (hupo) and therefore stable by reason of its reliability. Here it is used in conjunction with *things hoped for* (elpizomenon; from elpizo). By its nature hope is not based in the present, only the future, yet the association of this word with hupostasis means the object of hope...it’s “nature” (the alternate translation of hupostasis)...is already present. Actually the indefinite pragma (*things*) are hoped for; elpizomenon is an adjective which describes them.

2) *conviction* (elegchos): alternately as “proof,” refutation,” a term used by Socrates to evoke the truth through the dialogical process. “But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or outsider enters, he is *convicted* by all, he is called to account by all” [1 Cor 14.24]. Elegchos seems to differ from hupostasis in that it is something which demands an account and is more liable to be examined; by reason of its nature, hupostasis is more a more hidden, abiding reality upon which elegchos rests. In the verse at hand, elegchos pertains to *things not seen* (ou blepomenon; from blepo, the common word pertaining to sight).

Vs. 2: For by it the men of old received divine approval.

“It” referring to faith as hupostasis and as elegchos. The Greek text literally reads “*in* (en) this,” signifying full presence within.

The author of Hebrews attributes the two-fold nature of pistis to *men of old* or presbuteros (singular), an indirect way of contrasting their pistis with the relative weakness of his audience. Presbuteros can apply to those who presided over the Church: “and they did so, sending it to the *elders* by the hand of Barnabas and Saul” [Acts 11.30].

Received divine approval (martureo): the Greek text lacks “divine;” this verb denotes the giving of witness, of being a martyr. In the verse at hand, such illustrious men from Israel’s past which will soon be described in Chapter Eleven, are “borne witness to.” “You also *are witnesses*, because you have been with me from the beginning” [Jn 15.27].

Vs. 3: By faith we understand that the world was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made out of things which do not appear.

Many verses in this chapter begin with the phrase, *by faith* (pistei); as noted with respect to the first verse, it encompasses hupostasis and elegchos which relate to things invisible.

Here faith leads to *understanding* (noeo, verb) or careful consideration; i.e., it is the application of our nous which connotes a given position to which we owe allegiance. “Let the reader *understand*” [Mt 24.15]. The object of noeo: the *world* or aion, more specifically, a long or particular segment of chronos-logical time. “a Son whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the *world*” [1.2]. More specifically, that this world/time was created by God’s *word* or rhema. “Upholding the universe by his *word* of power” [1.3]: cf. remarks there which distinguishes this term from logos.

The world/time under discussion was *created* (katartizo) which has a fuller sense of being outfitted or brought to perfection. “*Equip* you with everything good that you may do his will” [13.21]. For another sense of this verb, cf. 1 Cor 1.10: “that all of you *agree* and that there be no dissensions among you.”

In the second half of this verse note the contrast between *what is seen* (to blepomenon) and those things *which do not appear* (me ek phainomenon, literally “not from those things which have appeared”). The common verb blepo—it signifies what is apparent to all—differs from phainomai which implies the ability to produce light or to shine. This lack of “shining” with respect to “what is seen” suggests the deeper ability of faith to grasp the distinction between seen/unseen.

Vs. 4: By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain through which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts; he died, but through his faith he is still speaking.

Here the hupostasis/elegchos of faith is delineated in the context of Abel’s offering who was the second child of Adam and Eve, that is, after Cain. The Genesis story focuses more upon Cain’s attitude which is summed up in 4.7: “And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.” Here is an interplay between *desire* (shuq) and *master* (mashal); the former literally means to run after something from which is derived the noun “leg.” The latter implies making like, the process of assimilation, which here is in connection with that “running” aspect attributed to desire.

The preposition para (*besides, by*) is used with respect to Cain which sets up a comparison between the two brothers’ *sacrifice* or thusia (cf. 8.3). The adjective pleion (*more acceptable*) is used with respect to Abel’s sacrifice, i.e., “better.”

Received approval (martureo): in the same sense as in 11.2 just noted, i.e., “borne by (divine) *witness*.” Abel was a “keeper of sheep” and Cain, “a tiller of the ground.” In the context of Hebrews with its detailed descriptions on Old Testament sacrifices to highlight that of Jesus of Christ, the sacrificial offerings (animals) make more sense than anything offered from the ground. It is interesting to note that Cain, despite his being a wanderer upon earth, became the ancestor of sedentary dwellers (cf. 4.17); this same verse says that Cain was the father of Enoch who later in 5.24 “walked with God; and he was not, for God took him.”

In contrast to Cain, Abel was found *righteous* or dikaios: “but my *righteous one* shall live by faith” [10.38].

“*God bearing witness*” (martureo): the same verb with respect to “received approval,” this second time concerning Abel’s *gifts* (dorea) which according to Gen 4.4 are “the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions.” Note that this same verse continues with “And the Lord *had regard* for Abel and his offering,” the Hebrew verb shahah connoting a looking towards someone for assistance. In the verse at hand, the prefix epi (*upon*) is used with respect to “gifts,” i.e., God “had regard” epi such offerings.

The verb *apothnesko* (*to die*) used concerning Abel does not necessarily refer to his murder by Cain although it is implied. Despite Abel's death, he "still *speaks*" (*laleo*), more accurately, his blood: "The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground" [Gen 4.10].

The specific word "faith" ("but through his faith") is lacking in the Greek text; it reads "*through* (*dia*) which."

Vs. 5: By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death; and he was not found because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was attested as having pleased God.

In the previous verse mention was made of Cain (who slew his brother Abel) being the father of Enoch. Note: "and he built a city and called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch" [Gen 4.17]. Perhaps a comparison can be made between this city and the heavenly Jerusalem of Revelation: that is, since Enoch was taken into heaven without seeing death, so the heavenly Jerusalem is symbolic of immortality.

Taken up (*metatithemi*): used twice in this verse and once as a noun; it alternately means "to change, transpose, translate." The literal sense of this verb is a "placing after," a transposition to a place other than the familiar one. For another use of this verb, cf. 7.12: "For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a *change* in the law as well." Gen 5.24 puts the verse at hand in context: "Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." Here is a correspondence between *walking* (*halak*), *was not* (*'eynenu*) and *taking* (*laqach*). The striking *'eynenu* almost means that Enoch "was not-ed"...blotted out of existence while he was walking along or living his life. The verb *laqach* does not imply a *taking up* (*halah*) as with the prophet Elijah in 2 Kg 2.11.

The words "not see death" suggests a blindness of sorts, a blinding of Enoch's eyes to the reality of human death.

"Was not found" is not in the Hebrew of Gen 4.24; *'eynenu* takes its place. To be "found" can mean that people were looking for Enoch but were unable to discover him.

Attested (*martureo*): in other words, "was given *witness*" which may apply to those persons attempting to find Enoch but could not.

The Hebrew of Genesis' account with regard to Enoch does not say that he *pleased* (*euaresteo*) God, that is, except reference in Sirach 44.16: "Enoch *pleased* the Lord and was taken up." The only other use of this verb is in 13.16: "for such sacrifices are *pleasing* to God."

Vs. 6: And without faith it is impossible to please him. For whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

To please (*euaresteo*): as noted in the previous verse with respect to Enoch. This verb which connotes a sense of delight is directly related to *pistis* and therefore casts *pistis* in a pleasing light. The first sentence of vs. 6 may be seen in connection with Wisd 4.10 which also touches upon Enoch: "There was one who *pleased* (*euarestos*) God and was loved by him, and while living among sinners he was taken up."

Draw near (proserchomai): as in 10.22: “Let us *draw near* with a true heart in full assurance of faith.” Such *proserchomai* with respect to God in the verse at hand pertains to an ever closer approach, not necessarily an attainment as this verb indicates.

The requirement for such a *pros*: believe that he *exists* (estin, alternately as “is”) which hearkens back to the name of YHWH revealed to Moses: “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” [Ex 3.6].

Consequent upon this belief in the divine is-ness, as it were, comes an expected *reward* or *misthapodotes*, the only occurrence of this noun in the New Testament. It better translates as “rewarder.”

Seek (ekzeteo): note the preposition *ek* (out, from) which indicates a more intense form of searching. Cf. 12.17: “for he (Esau) found no chance to repent, though he *sought* it with tears.”

Vs. 7: By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, took heed and constructed an ark for the saving of his household; by this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith.

Here *pistis* is situated in the context of a *warning* (chrematizomai, verb) as in 8.5: “for when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was *instructed* by God.” Note the two uses of this verb with respect to physical construction: that of a tent and that of an ark.

Events as yet *unseen* (medepo blepomenon) suggest a prophetic side to *pistis*. The Genesis account of this warning on Noah’s behalf is not specifically mentioned. However, God does say (not necessarily to Noah but almost rhetorically): “For I am sorry that I have made them” [6.7]. Again, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth” [6.14]. This second “warning” is directly addressed to Noah as opposed to the first.

“By God” is lacking in the Greek text.

The act of *chrematizomai* as being “instructed” relates directly to Noah’s *construction* (kataskeuazo, verb) of the ark; note the preposition *kata* (according to), as though Noah followed a divine plan outlined in Gen 6.14–16. This verse is akin to Moses’ instruction by God on Mount Sinai, Exodus 20 ff.

Ark (kibotos): as in 9.4: “having the golden altar of incense and the *ark* of the covenant covered on all sides with gold.” The Hebrew for *kibotos* is *tevath* as in Ex 2.5: “She (Pharaoh’s daughter) saw the *basket* among the reeds and sent her maid to fetch it.”

Before constructing/being instructed with respect to the *kibotos*, Noah *took heed* or *eulabeomai*. For the only other New Testament occurrence, cf. Acts 23.10: “The tribune, *afraid* that Paul would be torn in pieces by them.” In the verse at hand the sentiment of anxiety contained in this verb pertains to the *saving* (soteria) of Noah’s

household (oikos). A certain parallel exists between this household and the ark in which it was inserted. The final touch to Noah's soteria, as it were, is when "the Lord shut him in" [Gen 7.16].

The verb act of constructing the kibotos was a *condemnation* or katakrino (verb). Note another use of kata prefixed to the verb, as if to parallel that of kataskeuazo (*to construct*), implying that a plan of sorts were being followed. Such condemnation was not directly evident to Noah's contemporaries who, according to Mt 24.38, "were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage." Kosmos (*world*) is the object of Noah's censure; compare aion as *world* in 11.3.

Righteousness of dikaiosune results from faith ("by or kata faith"), a third feature of faith in addition to hupostasis and elegchos of 11.1. Also we have a third use of kata in the same verse or an order with regard to faith. More accurately, Noah becomes an *heir* of such righteousness or kleronomos. Cf. 6.17: "So when God desired to show more convincingly to the *heirs* of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he interposed with an oath."

Vs. 8: By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go.

Vss. 8 through 12 relate to Abraham as well as vss. 17 through 19.

With respect to Abraham, there is a correspondence between his pistis and *obedience* (hupakouo, verb). I.e., faith primed him, as it were, to listen (this verb's fundamental meaning) or more specifically, his capacity of "listening *under*" (hupo). Cf. 5.9: "he became the source of eternal salvation to all who *obey* him."

Note: The part which concerns the author of Hebrews is Chapter Twelve of Genesis, that dealing with Abram; his name is not changed to Abraham until 17.5.

Abraham's "listening under" took the form of migration, of *going out* (ex-erchomai) *into* (eis) an unknown destination or *place* (topos). Even though he was in the process of migrating, Abraham carried with him the hupo of hup-akouo, as it were, throughout his journey. This ex-eis process culminates in Abraham's inheritance or "*into* (eis) *inheritance*" (kleronomia). Cf. 9.15: "so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal *inheritance*."

Abraham *goes out* (ex-erchomai again) without *knowing* (epistamai) his destination; the latter verb implies being acquainted with someone or something, "being epi" or *upon* the object of one's knowledge. "Brethren, you *know* that in the early days God made choice among you" [Acts 15.7]. As for this not-knowing, Abraham and his family departed for Canaan, more specifically, Shechem (cf. 12.6), which was a commercial crossroads at the time. That is to say, Abraham did not randomly set off but had many people with him, so most likely he choose a well-established road. Abraham did not "go out" alone but enjoyed the company of family members. Compare with Moses later on who left Egypt with the Israelites but did not see the promised land.

Vs. 9: By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a foreign land, living in tents with Isaac and Jacob, heirs with him of the same promise.

Sojourned (paroikeo): literally, to dwell *alongside* (para) of in the sense of having a temporary residence. “Are you the only *visitor* to Jerusalem who does not know the things that happened there in these days” [Lk 24.18]? In the verse at hand, Abraham lives *para*, as it were, with respect to the land of promise which at first glance seems curious because God had given it to him and his descendants as a permanent dwelling.

“Land of *promise*” (epaggelia): compare a parallel use with 4.1: “Therefore, while the *promise* of entering his rest remains.” Here “rest” pertains to the Sabbath rest which was preceded by the six days of creation.

In light of this Sabbath rest, the land of promise is analogous to a *foreign land* (allogeneia), the word “land” not in the Greek. This is an adjective which literally means “belonging to another.” For another use, cf. Jn 10.5: “A *stranger* they will not follow, but they will flee from him.”

The fact that Abraham *lived* (katoikeo) in tents with Isaac and Jacob enhances the temporary aspect of their residence. On the other hand, they were acquainted with this form of living due to their nomadic background. Compare *katoikeo* with *paroikeo*: the former suggests a mode of living more or less permanent or in this instance, a way of life with regard to tents (*kata*: *according to...a given mode*). “And that Christ may *dwell* in your hearts through faith” [Eph 3.17].

All three patriarchs are *heirs* (sugkleronomos) of the epaggelia, the same term used three paragraphs above with respect to the “land of *promise*.” The preposition *sug* (or *sun*, *with*) means “fellow heir.” “And if children, then heirs, heirs of God and *fellow heirs* with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him” [Rom 8.17].

One important context of the verse at hand is Gen 23.4: “I am a stranger and a sojourner among you,” that is, among the Hittites. In Hebrew *stranger* is *ger* and *sojourner* is *toshav* which is derived from a verb meaning to sit or dwell. Refer to an article on this Lectio Divina Home Page entitled “Biblical References Pertaining to the Concept of Exile.”

Vs. 10: For he looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

Looked forward (ekdechomai): alternately, “to await expectantly.” Note the preposition *ek* prefixed to the verb *dechomai* (*to receive, expect*), as if Abraham were getting something “out of” or “from” his condition as sojourner. The city he anticipates has *foundations* or *themelios* (cf. below); Abraham and his sons had their own tent city, as it were, without foundations.

Builder and *maker* (technites and demiourgos): with reference to God as opposed to a human founder. Note that Enoch was the first person to have built a city (cf. Gen 4.17) discussed in connection with vs. 5. The first term

pertains to a craftsman and designer; the second (only occurrence in the New Testament) suggests a public workman.

The verse at hand anticipates the heavenly Jerusalem; if we keep themelios as representative of the twelve apostles, Abraham anticipated this city in the person of these founders of the church of Jesus Christ. “And the wall of the city had twelve *foundations*; and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” [Rev 21.14]. To Abraham, the twelve apostles have special import as the twelve tribes of Israel from his son Jacob/Israel.

Vs. 11: By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.

Attention now shifts to Abraham’s wife in reference to *power* or *dunamis* which she had received. The verb *lambano* is used; compare with Abraham and his inheritance. The biblical sense of *dunamis* has various shades of meaning from miraculous occurrences to the ability to perform an action. For a sense of this word paralleling the verse at hand: “To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his *ability*” [Mt 25.15].

Conceive (*eis katabolen spermatos*): this phrase consists of two nouns: *katabole* or literally “a casting down” as if to sow seeds; note the use of *eis* (*into*) as if to indicate full awareness of the action involved. Cf. 9.26 for another use: “for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the *foundation* of the world.” *Sperma* or *seed* which alternately reads “descendant” as in vs. 18 below.

Age (*kairos*): the particular time in the sense of special event often mentioned in these **Notes**.

Faithful (*pistos*) and *promised* (*epaggello*) go hand-in-hand here. “For when God *made a promise* to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself” [6.13]. Since the author of Hebrews uses *epaggello* in conjunction with Abraham, it is easy in this light to see it apply to his wife Sarah.

The context of this verse is Gen 17.19; 18.11–4 and 21.2.

Vs. 12: Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

Good as dead (*nekroomai*): “*Put to death* what is earthly in you” [Col 3.5]. This verb is one half of the paradox, the other half being Abraham’s descendants. The verse has *nekroomai* in the aorist passive as to show the equally passive role of Abraham regarding future generations and as though he were merely the agent. Such passivity is often found in the interaction between God and humans, a prime example being the Virgin Mary.

For another use of *nekroomai* in the same context of vs. 12, cf. Rom 4.19: “He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as *good as dead* because he was about a hundred years old.”

The verse at hand is largely lifted from Gen 15.5 and 22.17 to form one sentence. The former is preceded by “And he brought him outside and said,” this “outside” being outside a tent which was noted in vs. 9, that is, a temporary dwelling. Vs. 6 completes the sense of vs. 5: “And he believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness.” As for 22.17, vs. 18 similarly amplifies its meaning: “and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves because you have obeyed my voice.”

Vs. 13: These all died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

In faith (kata pistin): as noted several times earlier, kata connotes an order which in this verse pertains to belief. “These” are Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Sarah whom the author of Hebrews mentioned thus far in Chapter Eleven.

Received (komizo; for another use, cf. vs. 19: “figuratively speaking, he did *receive* him back.”): in the sense of coming into the possession of something which did not happen, better, regarding “what was *promised*” (epaggelia, noun). Consider this verse in light of vs. 9: “By faith he sojourned in the land of *promise*.” From one point of view, the claim about the seven persons not having achieved the divine promise is inaccurate. Abel seems to be the only one who suffered the greatest injustice; the others did enjoy actual presence in the promised land even though they had to intermingle with the native inhabitants. Keep in mind that they were present there before the descent into Egypt and hence, the Exodus which in Israelite history was the prelude to possession of the land...possession in the full sense after their experience at Mount Sinai and all this entailed.

Despite not being fulfilled, the seven persons mentioned thus far did have a glimpse of the divine promise. First comes *seeing* (oraō, the simple verb for this action; cf. 9.29, *appear*) followed by *greeting* (aspazomai); both may be taken in the context of distance, that is, from *afar* (porrothen). This verb is often used at the conclusion of St. Paul’s letters, for example, Rom 16.3: “*Greet* Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus.”

Such vision and salutation at a distance is concomitant with an *acknowledgment* (homologeō, verb) that the seven persons involved here are both *strangers* (xenos) and *exiles* (parepidemos). This verb alternately implies a confession as well as a commitment. “If you *confess* with your lips that Jesus is Lord” [Rom 10.9]. The latter term is stronger than the former; it is comprised of two prepositions: para (*besides*) and epi (*upon*) prefixed to the noun demos (*land, district*). The significance is that an exile is one living besides native inhabitants as well as “upon” them in the sense of depending on them. Thus a paradox in that exiles are both independent and dependent at the same time. “Beloved, I beseech you as aliens and *exiles* to abstain from the passions of the flesh that wage war against your soul” [1 Pt 2.11].

The verse at hand is specific with regards to xenos and parepidemos: the earth, rather, “*on* (epi) the earth,” and this earth can include the promised land as well as other locales which are distinct from the land of Sabbath rest.

Vs. 14: For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland.

“People” includes not only the seven Old Testament witnesses just recounted by those like them which includes those to whom the Letter to the Hebrews is addressed. To “speak thus” suggests a permanent, habitual outlook of being a sojourner with regard to earthly existence. Their mode of speech *makes clear* (emphanizo) their intent. Cf. 9.26 for another sense of this verb: “...he has *appeared* once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” I.e., Christ made his incarnation “clear” to all persons, especially to strangers and exiles.

The object of emphanizo, as it were, is the search for a *homeland* (patris), alternately, “fatherland” in the sense of one’s birth place. “He went away from there and came to his *own country*” [Mk 6.1]. This *search* (epizeteo, verb) is more intense by reason of the preposition epi (*upon*). If we keep in mind the epi with regard to par(epi)demos, this search takes place by reason of exposure to those persons focused upon earthly existence.

Vs. 15: If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return.

Thinking (mnemoneuo; cf. 13.7): better, “to remember” which intimates innate knowledge with respect to patris or *homeland*; in the context of Hebrews it may be taken as that Sabbath rest. “Remember Lot’s wife” [Lk 17.32].

The object of such thinking/rememering: the land from which the seven Old Testament exemplars had *left* (exbaino). Thus mnemoneuo does not focus exclusively upon such “ex,” for despite its innate knowledge, “remembering” is forward looking.

Opportunity (kairos): here with respect to *returning* (anakampto). Kampto means *to bend, to curve*; the preposition ana (*on, upward*) suggests a return in the sense of re-appropriation of ways which were left behind. Ex 16.3 conveys the longing for a return but in a different sense: “Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt when we sat by the fleshpots and ate bread to the full.”

Vs. 16: But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

But as it is (nun): alternately, “now” or “the truth is.” The author of Hebrews uses nun to get at the heart of the matter with regard to these sojourners: their *desire* (oregomai, verb) which is rooted in memory (cf. mnemoneuo of vs. 15). For another use of this verb, cf. 1 Tm 6.10: “It is through this *craving* (for money) that some have wandered away from the faith.” I.e., oregomai is often associated with longing with regard to lust and gain.

The object of desire here is for *better* (kraittonos), “country” not being used in the Greek text which is contrasted with its opposite adjective, epouranios (*heavenly*), as is used in 8.5: “They serve a copy and shadow of the *heavenly* sanctuary.” I.e., the downward pull commonly associated with desire is presented in an upward movement, towards heaven.

Ashamed (aischunomai): “As it is my eager expectation and hope that I shall not be at all *ashamed*” [Phil 1.20]. The author of Hebrews averts this sentiment in the verse at hand as it pertains to God. Keeping in mind the seven

notables in Chapter Eleven, refer to Ex 3.6 when God reveals himself to Moses. Here he is “not ashamed” to identify himself as “the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” Note the identity of “God” with each of these three patriarchs.

City (polis): a term freighted with Hellenistic connotations; contrast with the tents in which Abraham and his sons dwelt as sojourners (vs. 8+). The general sense of God *preparing* (etoimazo) this polis is a central theme to the Book of Revelation, especially 21.11–21. Those expecting its descent may be said to have this vision in mind, even seminally. Also, refer to **Notes on the Life of St. Anthony** elsewhere on this Home Page.

Vs. 17: By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was ready to offer up his only son,

“By faith:” a resumption of this phrase begun in vs. 3 and interrupted in between vss. 12 and 16; here it gets back to the central figure of Abraham’s *test* (peirazo, verb) by God. Compare with Jesus Christ in 2.18: “For because he himself has suffered and been *tempted*, he is able to help those who are *tempted*.”

The temptation consisted in Abraham offering his only son, Isaac as recounted in Gen 22.1–10. After his ordeal, Abraham “called the name of that place the Lord will provide” [vs. 14] or in Hebrew, “the Lord will *see* (ra’ah).” In the next verse he exclaims, “On the mount of the Lord it shall be provided” or in Hebrew, “he will be seen.” Perhaps reference is to the angel’s appearance at the moment when Abraham was about to slay Isaac as well as Abraham’s exclamation in vs. 11, “Here am I,” that is, here am I, ready to be seen.

The verse at hand says that Abraham *offered* (prosphero; cf. 8.3) Isaac but the Genesis account says that he was about to but was prevented by the angel.

Abraham *received* (anadechomai) promises; note the plural which can include Abraham’s (plural) descendants which will be vast as the stars (cf. 15.5). The only other New Testament occurrence of this verb: “...the chief man of the island named Publius who *received* us and entertained us hospitably for three days” [Acts 28.7].

Abraham’s readiness (the adjective “ready” is not used in the Greek text) to sacrifice Isaac is summed up in his words, “Here am I” [Gen 22.1] which in Hebrew is hineny, more akin to “behold.”

Vs. 18: of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your descendants be named.”

The conclusion of the sentence begun in the previous verse which shows the importance of Isaac regarding future generations.

The Greek text has the preposition “en (*in*) Isaac;” i.e., future generations are present in him going back to his position on the altar when Abraham was about to slay him. Also, the above mentioned verses from Genesis may be said to be bound up with Isaac: “The Lord will see” and “On the mount of the Lord he will be seen” [22.14].

The quote in the verse at hand is found in Gen 21.12 (cf. Rom 9.7 for this quote as well) which reads in full: “But God said to Abraham, ‘Be not displeased because of the lad and because of your slave woman (Hagar); whatever Sarah says to you, do as she tells you, for through Isaac shall your descendants be named.’” The favor shown towards Isaac is taken in the context of the banishment of Hagar and her son Ishmael who was also destined to be a “great nation” [vs. 18] but one through whom descendants would be blessed by God although differently compared with Isaac.

Descendants (sperma): literally, “seed.” Cf. 11.11: “By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive.”

Vs. 19: He considered that God was able to raise men even from the dead; hence, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.

Considered (logizomai): implies the careful weighing of evidence, of taking into account the logos or heart of the matter. Cf. Rom 9.8 in the context of the discussion at hand: “...but the children of the promise are *reckoned* as descendants.”

Abraham’s ability to see the logos or reason of his near sacrifice of Isaac allows him to *figuratively* (en parabole) receive him back. Cf. 9.9: “which is *symbolic* for the present age.” I.e., both the substance of a given incident—the logos or object of log(os)-izomai—is able to be perceived en parabole, or better, is explained in this fashion.

Komizo (receive back): as in vs. 13, “These all died in faith, not having *received* what was promised.”

Vs. 20: By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau.

Invoked (eulogeo): literally, “to speak well” as in 6.14: “Surely I will *bless* you and multiply you.”

The context of the verse at hand is Genesis 27. Note that the author of Hebrews imparts blessings on *both* Jacob and Esau as opposed to Jacob alone which is the theme of this chapter. The blessing upon Jacob reads as follows: “See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed! May God give you of the dew of heaven and of the fatness of the earth and plenty of grain and wine. Let peoples serve you and nations bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may your mother’s sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be everyone who blesses you” [vss. 27–9]! Such a blessing Isaac mistakenly bestows upon Jacob who disguised himself as Esau. Later Isaac blessed Esau as follows: “Behold, away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be, and away from the dew of heaven on high. By your sword you shall live, and you shall serve your brother; but when you break loose you shall break his yoke from your neck’ [vss. 39–40].

Vs. 21: By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.

Blessed: another use of eulogeo as in the previous verse (“invoked”).

The author of Hebrews omits Jacob's blessing of his twelve sons in Egypt (cf. Gen 49), perhaps because they had maltreated Joseph and were not worthy of mention despite their being patriarchs of the twelve tribes of Israel. Instead, focus is upon Joseph's sons: "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has led me all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and in them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth" [Gen 48.15-6]. Later in vs. 20 Jacob says, "By you Israel will pronounce blessings, saying, 'God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh.'" Over Joseph's objection Jacob prefers Ephraim over Manasseh who is the first-born of Joseph. This incident is reminiscent of Isaac having been deceived by Jacob with help from his mother Rebekah; perhaps Jacob had it mind when preferring Ephraim over Manasseh.

The context of Jacob's staff is Gen 47.31 which reads in the LXX: "Then Israel bowed upon the head of his *staff* (rhabdos)." Cf. 9.4 for another use of this word: "...and Aaron's *rod* that budded." The Hebrew is mitah (*bed*) which the LXX confused as mateh; both are from the same verbal root.

Note that mention of Jacob and his staff occurs before his blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh. The context is his request to Joseph not to be buried in Egypt but with his fathers. Joseph made a similar request (cf. Gen 49.29), this despite the generosity Egypt had shown to both Jacob and Joseph as well as their descendants there until the time of the Exodus.

Vs. 22: By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his burial.

End (teleutao, verb): in the sense of Joseph's life coming to completion (cf. telos as in 7.3, etc.). "...the patriarch David that he both *died* and was buried" [Acts 2.29].

In the verse at hand a close connection exists between Joseph's telos and the Exodus. Note the verb mnemoneuo (*made mention*) as in vs. 15: "If they had been *thinking* of that land from which they had gone out." There was mentioned how mnemoneuo pertains to memory, of remembering; it is consistent with Joseph who was endowed with the gift of prophecy.

Chapter Fifty of Genesis first speaks of the death of Jacob, Joseph's father who as noted in vs. 21 along with his son, did not wish to be buried in Egypt but with his fathers.

Gave directions (entellomai): as in 9.2 ("This is the blood of the covenant which God *commanded* you"). The instructions are found in Gen 50.24-5 where Joseph enjoins his brothers by oath to take his body from Egypt when God visits them. It is fulfilled in Ex 13.19: "And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him." Note that Joseph does not mention Egypt by name but calls it "this land" [50.24] and contracts it with "the land which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob" [also, vs. 24].

Burial (osteon): literally, "bone," which is consistent with Ex 13.19 just noted. Joseph's bones are placed in a *coffin* or 'aron, the same word for "ark" in the sense of ark of covenant (cf. Ex 25.10).

Vs. 23: By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid for three months by his parents because they saw that the child was beautiful; and they were not afraid of the king's edict.

A display of Moses' faith through vs. 28. The faith here does not pertain to Moses *per se* but to his parents who were of the house of Levi (cf. Ex 2.1). When it became impossible to hid their son, the mother put him in a *basket* or *tevah*. Cf. 9.4 which mentions this word in conjunction with Noah's *ark*, etc.

Beautiful (*asteios*): in the sense of an uncommon loveliness; literally it pertains to what pertains to a city. The only other New Testament reference is Acts 7.20 and again refers to Moses: "At this time Moses was born and was *beautiful* before God."

The king's *edict* or *diatagma* (only New Testament occurrence of this word) is as follows: "Every son that is born to the Hebrews you shall cast into the Nile, but you shall let every daughter live" [Ex 2.22]. Moses' parents did obey the edict but in a different sense.

Vs. 24: By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter,

Despite his having been raised by Pharaoh's daughter, Moses identified with the Hebrews, the turning point being when he saw an Egyptian maltreating one of the Hebrews (cf. Ex 2.11-15). Note that vs. 11 has "one of his people," that is, one of Moses' people.

Vs. 25: choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin.

The conclusion of the sentence begun in vs. 25.

Share ill-treatment (*sugkakoucheo*): the only New Testament occurrence of this verb, literally, "with-to be evil." Moses fled Egypt when he slew the Egyptian maltreating a fellow Hebrew; the Exodus text does not say that Moses actually engaged in slave-like toil but was the leader, a different type of *sugkakoucheo* in that he was responsible for the Israelites' well-being. It is interesting to observe that before God revealed himself to Moses we have this verse by way of preface, "And the people of Israel groaned under their bondage and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God" [Ex 2.23]. At the time Moses perceived no clear-cut connection between Israel's distress and the revelation of God's name.

Fleeting (*proskairos*): note the preposition *pros* (*towards, in the direction of*) prefixed to *kairos*, last noted in vs. 15 as "opportunity." "They have no root in themselves, but endure for *a while*" [Mk 4.17]. This adjective is used with regard to sin's *pleasures* (*apolausis*, singular). The sense of such illicit enjoyment is implied with the option Moses would have had if he remained in Pharaoh's household where he was raised. The only other New Testament reference: "...nor to set their hopes on uncertain riches but on God who richly furnishes us with everything to *enjoy*" [1 Tim 6.17].

Vs. 26: He considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt, for he looked to the reward.

Considered (hegeomai): alternately, “to function as a leader.” “...and *count* them as refuse in order that I may gain Christ” [Phil 3.8]. The object of the verb is *abuse* (oneidismos), better, *reproach*: “The *reproaches* of those who *reproached* you fell on me” [Rom 15.3]. The English word “suffered” is not in the Greek text; “Christ” is in the genitive case, i.e., “abuse of Christ.”

Oneidismos is equated here with its opposite, *wealth* (ploutos) which is set in opposition to Egypt’s *treasures* (thesauros). “Lay up for yourselves *treasures* in heaven” [Mt 6.20]. Again, there is no direct association of Moses with this wealth except for having been raised by Pharaoh’s daughter and all that entails. For a parallel sense, consider how the Israelites spoiled the Egyptians just before the Exodus (cf. Ex 12.35–6).

The author presupposes that Moses knew Jesus Christ; associated bound up with the Second Person of the Trinity is the revelation of the divine name in Ex 3.14, “I am who am.” Also, cf. Jn 5.46: “If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me.”

Looked (apoblepo): the only occurrence of this verb in the New Testament which literally means “look away *from* (apo)” but also means “look upon.” The object of this verb: *misthapodosia* (*reward*) as in 10.35: “Therefore do not throw away your confidence which has a great *reward*.”

Vs. 27: By faith he left Egypt, not being afraid of the anger of the king; for he endured as seeing him who is invisible.

In this verse the author of Hebrews has Moses leaving Egypt; there is no mention of him leading Israel from this land: cf. vs. 29 for a reference but again, no mention of Moses. Since vs. 27 speaks of that which is visible and invisible (this occurs before the theophany to Moses on Mount Sinai after the Exodus), reference to divine transcendence may allude to the revelation of the divine name **YHWH** in Ex 3.14.

Left (kataleipo): connotes not just a simple departure but one fully *in accord* (kata) with the notion of leaving, that is, a thorough forsaking of one’s previous dwelling. For another sense of this verb, cf. 4.1: “while the promise of entering his rest *remains*.” “And *leaving* them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there” [Mt 21.17].

Anger (thumos): “Let all bitterness and wrath and *anger* and clamor and slander be put away from you” [Eph 4.31]. Pharaoh had expressed his thumos towards Moses and Israel more through hardening his heart as with the ten plagues, for example, Ex 7.13. The culmination is found in 14.17: “And I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his hosts, his chariots and his horsemen.”

Endured (kartereo): the only New Testament use of this term, here with respect to *seeing* (horaō) God who is *invisible* (to aoraton, from the same verb, “the invisible one”). The Exodus account is full of instances where God

is manifest to the people as well as to Moses. Perhaps the author of Hebrews has in mind “and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen” [33.23].

Vs. 28: By faith he kept the Passover and sprinkled the blood so that the Destroyer of the first-born might not touch them.

Kept (poieo): the simple verb *to make*, as if to indicate that the Passover was something actively carried through as distinct from the common understanding of a rite to be observed.

Sprinkled (proschusis): noun, the only occurrence of this word in the New Testament and object of the verb poieo. The first mention of sprinkling with respect to sacrificial blood is 9.19: “He took the blood of calves and goats with water and scarlet wool and hyssop and *sprinkled* both the book itself and all the people.” The verb here is rhantizo, different from proschusis, which connotes a pouring-out or a more thorough dousing. The verb proscheo is used in the LXX of Ex 24.6: “And Moses took half of the blood and put it in basins, and half of the blood he *threw against* the altar.”

Destroyer (olothreuo): literally, “he who destroys,” action being carried out in the present and which is ongoing. “...nor grumble, as some of the did and were *destroyed* by the *Destroyer*” [1 Cor 10.10]. In the verse at hand, the Destroyer pertains to a guise assumed by the Lord to slay the *first-born* (prototokos). Note the time, the middle of the night: “At midnight the Lord smote all the first-born in the land of Egypt from the first-born of Pharaoh who sat on his throne to the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon” [Ex 12.29]. Prototokos is used in reference to Jesus Christ as in 1.6: “And again, when he brings the *first-born* into the world.”

Touch (thiggano) is also found in 12.20: “If even a beast *touches* the mountain, it shall be stoned.” In both instances thiggano is equivalent to death and was the final impulse that made Pharaoh drive out Israel from Egypt.

Vs. 29: By faith the people crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land; but the Egyptians, when they attempted to do the same, were drowned.

Crossed (diabaino): literally, “to cross through” which is in accord with Ex 14.22: “And the people of Israel went into the midst of the sea on dry ground, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.” Here the people are presented as having gone into, not crossed, the sea. The Hebrew has betok (*in the midst*) or the very center of the water, as it were, which is emphasized by water piled up on their left and right. Vs. 29 has “as if” whereas the Exodus account omits this in favor of the actual presence of Israel betok the Red Sea.

Drowned (katapino): literally, “to swallow down.” The Hebrew of Ex 14.27 puts it interestingly: “And the Lord shook off the Egyptians *in the midst* (betok: the same betok as with Israel) of the sea.” The idea of *shaking off* (nahar) the Egyptians suggests a casual throwing off almost in a comical sense. For another use of the verb katapino, cf. 1 Pt 5.8: “Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to *devour*.”

Vs. 30: By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they had been encircled for seven days.

Note the passiveness communicated by the two verbs: “fell down” and “had been encircled.” While Joshua and the Israelites were actively involved, the author of Hebrews wishes to impart the fact that God effected Jericho’s fall.

Chapter six of Joshua describes the siege of Jericho where the number seven occurs repeatedly: seven priests, seven trumpets, seven encirclements of Jericho, seven days. Once the city walls fell, Joshua devoted everything to the Lord for *destruction* (*cherem*: a paradoxical word, in a sense, for it connotes devotion to God by means of destroying something which is of value; cf. vs. 17).

Vs. 31: By faith Rahab the harlot did not perish with those who were disobedient because she had given friendly welcome to the spies.

Rahab’s faith was rooted in her words, “I *know* that the Lord has given you the land and that the fear of you has fallen upon us and that all the inhabitants of the land melt away before you” [Jos 2.9]. The Hebrew verb *yadad* used here can refer to intimate knowledge as well as having a more common sense. Rahab seems to have gotten her information from neighboring people who heard about the fact that God delivered Israel into its hands. This occurs early in Joshua; no mention is made about warfare, so perhaps local inhabitants heard reports of Joshua’s address to Israel which implies hostility: “then you shall return to the land of your possession and shall possess it, the land which Moses the servant of the Lord gave you beyond the Jordan toward the sunrise” [1.15]. Thus Rahab heard the reports circulating in the neighborhood which probably included news about Israel’s exodus from Egypt some forty years prior and how God destroyed the Egyptian army at the Red Sea.

The author of Hebrews calls the (presumed) inhabitants of Jericho *disobedient*, from the verb *apeitheo*. “So they have now been *disobedient* in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may receive mercy” [Rom 11.31]. Compare with vs. 8: “By faith Abraham *obeyed* when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance.” The verb here is *hupakouo*, literally, a “listening under;” *apeitheo* consists of *peitho* (*to persuade*) with alpha privative prefixed to it, i.e., the inhabitants of Jericho were not persuaded.

Friendly welcome (*dexamene met’ eirenes*): literally, “having received with peace” those sent by Joshua to spy out the land. Although Rahab was instrumental for Israel’s success, her favorable disposition centered upon her own safety and that of her household. Jos 6.25 says that the spies, having lived up to their oath, allowed Rahab and her extended family to live, “and she dwelt in Israel to this day because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho.”

Vs. 32: And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets—

Fail (*epileipo*): the only occurrence of this verb in the New Testament, a sentiment which parallels that of the conclusion of John’s Gospel: “But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were everyone of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.”

This notion of “failing” with regard to words concerning these Old Testament notables—Jdg 6–8; 4–5; 13–16; 11–12; 1 Sam 16–30; 2 Sam 1–24; 1 Kg 1–2.11; 1 Sam 1–12; 15.1–16.13—is closely related to the lack of *time* or *chronos*.

Vss. 33–8 describe in some detail the ability of these persons to overcome horrendous obstacles. They are omitted here because their accounts do not pertain directly to the content of these **Notes**.

Vs. 38 says that the “*world* (*kosmos*) was not worthy” of such persons. Cf. vs. 7 for a similar sentiment: “by this (Noah’s construction of the ark) he condemned the *world* and became an heir of the righteousness which comes by faith.” The deserts, mountains, dens and caves of vs. 38 are similar in meaning to Noah floating over the submerged world, that is, both examples demonstrate a distance or detachment from the *kosmos* and parallels the sentiments of sojourner, etc., depicted earlier in Chapter Eleven.

Vs. 39: And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised.

Well attested (*martureomai*): literally, “to bear witness” here with respect to faith, that faith demonstrated by the Old Testament examples in Chapter Eleven beginning with Abel.

“By their faith:” note the preposition *dia* is used here or “*through* their faith.”

“Receive what was promised:” a restatement of vs. 13 which reads, “These all died in faith, not having received what was promised” (etc.).

Vs. 40: since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

The author of Hebrews states his purpose for having recounted in some detail Old Testament worthies, that is, their relationship to “us” or Christians of his time.

Had foreseen (*problepomai*): the only New Testament use of this verb which bears a certain parallel to Rahab in vs. 31 having foreknowledge of the spies’ mission. This verb consists of *blepo* (*to see*) prefixed by *pro*, *before*...i.e., a “seeing before” events. Since this *pro-blepomai* was worked out in the context of Old Testament persons who did not attain divine promises as Hebrews had recounted, their partial completion is deliberate. That is to say, they were not *made perfect* or *teleioo* “apart from us,” an indirect way of implying the revelation of Jesus Christ and the foundation of his church.

The contrast between the two different modes of time, *kairos* and *chronos*, are essential for understanding Chapter Eleven. The author’s audience or “us” who live in the present *chronos*—as well as the Old Testament examples who were subject to the same *chronos* by reason of being sojourners and suffering persecution—are lifted from its restrictions into a new dimension or *kairos* which is fulfilled through the priesthood of Jesus Christ, an earlier

theme of Hebrews.

+ The End +