The acknowledgment that “now we do not yet see all things subjected to him” (2:8c) is a critical turn in the argument of Hebrews, for it calls into question all that the author has said until this point. The opening words of the homily proclaimed that God broke the silence, speaking to the listeners (“to us,” 1:2) through the incarnation, death, and exaltation of the son (1:1-4). Anticipating the argument of the entire homily, the author gives special emphasis to the exaltation as the occasion of the son’s inheritance of a new name and appointment as God’s son (1:4-5). God has also spoken to the son through the Scriptures (1:5-13), confirming the son’s eternal, cosmic rule (1:7-13). Linking two psalms that share a common phrase in a christological reading (Ps 110:1; 8:5-7), the author proclaims both that God will “place all enemies under his feet” (1:13; cf. Ps 110:1) and that God has “placed all things under this feet” (2:8a; Ps 8:7). Indeed, he reinforces the latter claim, affirming that “he left nothing that is not in subjection to him” (2:8b).

The tension between the two psalms corresponds to the crisis experienced by the readers, whose voice may be heard in the objection, “Now we do not yet see all things in subjection” (2:8c). Although they have heard of the eschatological victory “in these last days” (1:2; cf. 6:4), they do not consciously share in it, for they live between the “now” (vuv, 2:8c; cf. 8:6) and the

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“not yet” (οὐ̂ πῶς, 2:8c). The author has mentioned their place in this cosmic victory—even angels serve them (1:14)—but what they have heard conflicts with what they see. At the moment, the heavenly world is remote from them, and the promises remain unfulfilled. The enthronement of the son does not correspond to the realities on earth. What they see is fear of death (2:14-17), marginalization (10:32-34; 13:3), and suffering (12:4-11). The continuing inability to see the salvation weakens the faith of the addressees, giving the impression that they are helpless before all powers. Because the end of their suffering is not in sight, they are in danger of drifting away (2:1; cf. 3:12; 6:4) rather than remain steadfast until the end (cf. 3:12; 6:4, 9-11).

Although their dilemma grows out of disappointment with the claims of triumph in their confession, it is not unlike the common problem faced by others in antiquity who struggled with the remoteness of the transcendent world from their own lives. One of the major challenges of Middle Platonism, for example, was to overcome the distance separating the transcendent God from the physical world and humanity. God is the eternal and unchanging being, but humans


4März, “. . . Nur für kurze Zeit unter die Engel Gestellt (Hebr 2,7),” 49.

belong to an ever-changing reality that provides no stability for their lives. Both the author of Hebrews and the Middle Platonists addressed the problem of providing certainty within the context of disorienting realities.

My task in this paper is to demonstrate that the author meets that challenge, using the resources of rhetoric and philosophy to reinterpret the tradition handed on from the first generation of those who followed Christ (cf. 2:1-4) while offering a new reading of the Scriptures. He shares with the early Christian tradition the conviction that the church lives between the last days (1:2; cf. 6:4) inaugurated in the Christ event and the final day (Heb 10:25; cf. 9:27; 12:27-28). The central category for responding to the problem of the “not yet” is the promise, which the author reshapes with the categories of Hellenistic philosophy. While his belief in the incarnation and the end of the created world indicates that he is not a consistent Platonist, he nevertheless employs the language of Middle Platonism to accomplish his task.

The Rhetoric of Hebrews: The Message of the Promise

The author follows the common practice of rhetoricians who first named the stasis of the case before proceeding with the argument. According to Quintilian, the basis (Greek stasis) is the kind of question that arises from the first conflict between parties (Inst. 3.6.5). He adds that “every question is based on assertion by one party and denial by another” (Inst. 3.6.7). The stasis of this “word of exhortation” (13:22) is the conflict between the christological claims (1:1-14; 2:5-8) and the listeners’s response in 2:8c.

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7Craig Koester, Hebrews, AB 36 (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 221.
Quintilian maintains that the task of the speaker is to maintain a focus on the *stasis* throughout the argument, never introducing irrelevant issues into the case at hand (*Inst. 3.6.3*). The author’s consistent reference to the promise and its synonyms suggests the coherence of his argument. Forms of ἐπαγγέλλω appear throughout the homily—more frequently than in any book of the NT.8 Synonyms for ἐπαγγέλλω, which are also prominent in the homily, include ἐλπίζω (3:6; 6:11, 18; 7:19; 10:23; cf. ἐλπιζομένων in 11:1), God’s oath (cf. forms of ὀμνύειν in 3:11, 18; 6:13; 7:20-21), the inheritance (κληρονομία, 9:15; 11:8) of salvation (1:14; 6:12), and the reward (μισθαποδοσία, 10:35; cf. 11:6), as well as other images (cf. 4:3, 8-9; 10:34; 11:8-16).

Consistent with the author’s acknowledgment that “we do not yet see all things in subjection to him,” he never indicates that the promises have been fulfilled. In contrast to Acts and the Pauline letters, Hebrews presents the promise as a goal that lies in the future and a reality that is still unseen.9 Although ἐπαγγελλία is never used in the LXX in a theological sense,10 it is the comprehensive term in Hebrews for the eschatological hope.11

To place the eschatology of Hebrews within the narrative of Jewish expectation leaves

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9 The speakers of Acts claim that the story of Christ is the fulfillment of the promises to Israel (1:4; 2:33; 39; 7:17; 13:23, 32; 23:2; cf. Luke 24:49). According to Paul, the promise to Abraham of countless descendants has become a reality with the inclusion of the Gentiles (Rom. 4:17; Gal. 3:16-17; cf. Rom. 15:8-9). He affirms that “all of the promises have their ‘yes’ in Christ” (2 Cor. 1:20).


11 Schenck, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 60.
unanswered questions about the author’s interpretation of the promise, for ancient writers envisioned God’s promise to Israel in a variety of ways. Thus, as the scholarship of the past generation has shown, one can no longer demarcate sharply between Jewish eschatology and Platonic ontology because these perspectives intersected in a variety of ways. N. Wolter has described the variety of expressions of Jewish eschatology within the second temple period, distinguishing between apocalyptic and Hellenistic eschatology. While these two perspectives did not exist in isolation, they are nevertheless distinguishable. Apocalyptic expectation commonly included the hope for a future event that would result in the restoration of Israel in the land or in a new creation. Hellenistic Jewish texts speak of an individual hope rather than one of a future event and national restoration. Early Christian Platonists maintained both Platonic


13 In the Psalms of Solomon, for example, the writer laments that Israel was expelled from the inheritance (9:1) and prays that the “righteous will inherit the promise of the land” (12:6; 11:7, 9). In the Testament of Joseph, the patriarch prophesies that Egypt will oppress Israel, but that the Lord will lead the people to the land, “the promise made to your fathers” (20:1). Other texts speak of a catastrophic event that will result in a new heaven and new earth (cf. Syr. Bar. 57:2).

14 Hellenistic elements are evident in these passages. In the Testament of Job, the “holy land” is identical with the “world of the unchangeable,” the home already prepared for Job. In Joseph and Aseneth (8:11), Joseph prays that Aseneth will enter into God’s “rest” and live in God’s “eternal life for ever (and) ever.” Both 2 and 4 Maccabees anticipate eternal life with God for the martyrs, although neither refers to an earthly-historical event. According to 4 Maccabees, the ancestors live in eternity with God (7:19; 13:17; 16:25; 17:18), and martyrdom is the “path to immortality” (14:5-6; cf. 16:13), although nothing specific is said about how they proceed to immortality. Ps. Phocylides speaks of the immortality of the soul (115). According to the Wisdom of Solomon, one expects the immortality of the soul as the reward for the righteous (3:4; 4:14; 15:3). The souls of the righteous are in God’s hand, and nothing touches them (3:1). The life of the pious is already anchored in the heavenly world, and they have hope for immortality (3:4) and can expect eternal life and God’s reward (5:16f; 8:17f). Thus the thought of individual recompense and the certainty that the pious have eternal life is more important in this circle than
ontology and Jewish eschatology. Thus one does not need to choose between Jewish eschatology and Platonic ontology in the interpretation of Hebrews.

The Promise as the Grundgedanke of Hebrews

Interpreters have observed that numerous inclusios provide the structural signals indicating the coherence of the argument of Hebrews and the author’s constant focus on the stasis. The readers’ challenge to the author’s claim, “We do no yet see all things in subjection to him” (2:8c) forms an inclusio with the working definition of faith as the ἐλπίζομένων ὑπόστασις, πραγμάτων ἔλεγχος βλεπομένων (11:1). It is only one of numerous inclusios that provide the frame for the homily or units within it. Thus, although the homily has numerous alternations in subject matter and literary genre, the structural signals point to a coherent argument with three major divisions. The first major unit, marked by an inclusio on the word of God (1:1-2; 4:12-13),

how one conceives of the transition to heavenly existence. See Wolter, “‘Hellenistische Eschatologie,’” 340.


The opening words, “God has spoken . . .” (1:1) correspond to the divine voice that addresses the community near the end of the homily (12:25), promising to shake the heavens and the earth at the end (12:26-27). The contrast between the transient creation and the eternal son (1:8-12) corresponds to the contrast between the material creation and the abiding and unshakable reality (12:27-28). W. Nauck (“Zum Aufbau des Hebräerbriefes,” in Judentum-Christentum-Kirche, fs. J. Jeremias, BZNW 26 [ed. W. Eltester; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1964], 199-206. Albert Vanhoye and others have observed the correspondence between the portrayal of the unfaithful ancestors (3:1-4:11) and the faithful ancestors in chapter 11. See Albert Vanhoye, La structure littéraire de l’Épître aux Hébreux, StudNeot 1; Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1976), 53-58.
introduces the problem confronting the community: the dissonance between what it has heard and what it sees as it travels through the wilderness. The author responds with the promise of entering God’s rest (4:1-2). As the *inclusio* marking the central section indicates (4:14-16; 10:19-25), the cultic section provides the stable reality that the wavering community can now grasp (cf. κατεχεῖν in 4:14; 10:23; cf. κρατεῖν in 6:18): the guarantee of God’s promise (cf. 6:13-20; 7:19; 9:15).18 Building on the first two sections, the final division (10:32-13:25) is a renewed challenge for the community to hear the divine promise and an answer to the original dilemma posed by the gap between the community’s confession and the reality it sees. F. J. Schierse captures the emphasis on the promise, designating the three sections as 1) the community and the word of the promise (1:1-4:13), 2) the community and the work of the promise (4:14-10:31), and 3) the community and the goal of the promise (10:32-13:25).19

*The Promise That Remains (1:1-4:13)*

The first major section of Hebrews functions as a *narratio*, introducing the themes that the author will develop in the subsequent sections. The *inclusio* of 1:1-2 and 4:12-13 focuses the

18Although the *inclusio* that frames the central section is widely recognized, the division between the conclusion of the central section and the beginning of the final section is debated. The presence of the theme of ὑπομονή/ὑπομόνειν in 10:32-39 and 12:1-13 (cf. 10:32, 36; 12:1, 2, 7) as the frame for the list of heroes of faith suggests that the final section begins in 10:32. See also Christian Rose, *Die Wolke der Zeugen: eine exegetisch-traditionsgeschichtliche Untersuchung zu Hebräer 10,32-12,3*, WUNT 60 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1993), 30-33.

19F. J. Schierse, *Verheißung und Heilsvollendung: Zur theologischen Grundfrage des Hebräerb Briefes*, München: Karl Zink, 1955), 207-09. While I agree with Schierse’s division of the argument into subunits, I offer alternative titles for the subdivisions: 1) The promise that remains; 2) the promise guaranteed; and 3) the promise as “things hoped for” and “things unseen.”
attention of the readers on the word of God that now addresses the community. God not only has spoken in the Christ event (1:1-3; cf. forms of λέγειν in 1:5, 6, 7; 2:6), but now speaks directly to the community through Psalm 95 (3:7-15; 4:7). God’s oath to ancient Israel, “They shall not enter my rest” (3:11; cf. Ps. 95:11), is now a promise to the listeners, the inheritance of salvation (cf. 1:14) that remains unseen.

Both ancient Israel and the listeners received the same word of promise (cf. 4:1-2). Because of Israel’s failure to enter the κατάπαωσις, believers stand before a “promise that is still open” (4:1). In contrast to earlier Christian tradition, the promise in Hebrews has not become a reality, for it remains open to the listeners. It is both the promise that is “left over” (καταλειπομένης ἑπαγγελίας) and the sabbath that remains (ἀπολείπει, 4:6, 9) for the people of God. Thus the author responds to the community’s cognitive dissonance with the assurance that what it does not see remains open as a promise.

Κατάπαωσις is a polyvalent term in Jewish tradition. In the Pentateuch, the promise of the land is the inheritance (κληρονομία) and the place of rest (κατάπαωσις, cf. Deut 12:9-10; 25:19; Jos 21:43) from Israel’s enemies. In Isaiah, the temple is the place of God’s rest (Isa 66:2; cf. 1 Chron 23:25; 28:2). In Jewish apocalyptic literature it is the destiny of the faithful.20 As the argument from Scripture indicates in Heb 4:3-9, the promise is a participation in God’s primordial rest (4:3-9), not the earthly promised land. This use of the gezera shewa connecting κατάπαωσις in Ps 94 LXX with καταπαύειν in Gen 2:2 evokes the language of Philo and Middle Platonists, who employed the terminology of rest to speak of the immutability of God and the

transcendent world. Philo, like the author of Hebrews, identifies the Sabbath (Exod 20:10) with God’s rest, indicating that rest (ἀνάπαυσις) belongs to God alone (Cher. 87-90; Fug. 173-74), and that the human goal is to participate in God’s rest.\(^{21}\)

The repeated use of εἰσέρχωσθαί in 3:7-4:11 offers insight into the author’s understanding of the promise of rest. While Israel did not enter the transcendent rest (3:11, 18, 19) the author assures the readers, “we who believe enter (εἰσερχόμεθα) into the rest” (4:3), where they will rest as God rested (4:10). He concludes the section, “Let us take every effort to enter (εἰσελθεῖν) into that rest” (4:11). Elsewhere the author speaks of the hope “entering behind the curtain” at the exaltation of Christ (6:19) and of the occasion when the exalted high priest “entered” (εἰσῆλθεν) into the heavenly sanctuary (9:12, 24). To enter God’s rest, therefore, is to enter the transcendent sanctuary, the place of God’s rest. Like the author of Joseph and Aseneth, he envisions the promise as a place into which one enters (cf. Jos. As. 8:11).

The nature of this promise becomes evident in the author’s elaboration of the Christian confession in chapter 1. The exalted son sits at the right hand of God above the angels and the material world (1:3-13). In the claim that Jesus “sat down at the right hand of God” (1:3, 13), the author introduces the text (Ps 110:1) that dominates the homily (cf. 8:1; 6:20; 7:3, 23-24; 81; 10:12). The son who has sat down at God’s right hand (1:1, 13) has entered the heavenly sanctuary (8:1). The transcendent son and high priest abides forever (1:8-12; 7:3, 16, 23-24), having completed his work (cf. 10:12), while counterparts belonging to the creation exist in the

sphere of change and death (cf. 1:7; 7:23). After his descent below the angels, the son is now crowned with glory and honor (2:9). As the ἀρχηγός (2:10), he opens the way to the heavenly κατάπαυσις. The promise is neither the land of Canaan nor the countless descendants, as in traditional Jewish thought, but the participation in God’s transcendent rest. This rest is the equivalent to the place of the exaltation of Christ, for believers continue to follow the ἀρχηγός toward the destination. What the readers do not see is the fulfillment of the promise of participation in God’s transcendent rest. The author makes no reference to traditional apocalyptic events in this section, but to entering into God’s primordial rest, where the exalted Lord has gone. Thus the author holds before those who cannot see the cosmic victory the promise of the transcendent rest. Their task in this situation is to live on in the wilderness in faith. According to Heb 2-4, those who do not see the world in subjection to the son live as people in the wilderness on the way to the κατάπαυσις.

The Promise Guaranteed (4:14-10:31)

The inclusio of 4:14-10:31 indicates that the central cultic section of the homily has a paraenetic purpose: to encourage the readers to “hold on” (κατέχειν) to the confession (4:15; 10:23; cf. 6:18), knowing that “he who promises is faithful” (10:23). The references to the promise provide the frame for the cultic section (6:13-20; 10:23), indicating the author’s continued focus, which becomes especially evident in the paraenesis that introduces the cultic section in 7:1-10:18. After the stern warning in 5:11-6:8, the author expresses confidence in the readers’ faithfulness (6:9) and again urges them to maintain the “full assurance of hope until the end” (6:12). Echoing earlier exhortations (cf. 3:6, 14), he supports the paraenesis with the reflections on the promise in 6:9-20, using ἔπαγ- four times, ὁμνύειν/ὄρκος five times, and
two times within this brief unit. Having offered Israel as the example of ἀπίστια (3:12, 19; cf. 4:2), the author urges the readers to follow the positive example of “those who through πίστις and μακροθυμία inherit the promises” (6:12), but does not specify what promises the ancestors inherited. The use of the present participle (κληρονομούντων) and the plural ἐπαγγελίαι suggests that he is stating a general principle that was true in the past and remains true for the listeners (cf. 4:1-2).

Anticipating chapter 11, the author turns to Abraham in 6:13 to illustrate the general principle. For the second time in the homily, he associates God’s oath with the promise (cf. 3:11; 4:2), suggesting that the ancestors and the listeners stand before the same unfulfilled promise (6:13; cf. 3:11). Although he cites God’s promise to Abraham after the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22:17), he makes no reference to the original context. Moving from the plural ἐπαγγελίαι (6:12) to the singular, he says that Abraham obtained the promise (ἐπέτυχεν τὴν ἐπαγγελίας), drawing a parallel to the situation of the readers and suggesting that they too will inherit the promise only after they endure (cf. 10:36, ὑπομονή). Abraham, like the listeners, has received the irrevocable divine promise and is a model of the endurance necessary for those who do not see the fulfillment of the promise.

After another general statement in 6:16, the author applies the principle to the listeners.


23 As a general principle, the claim in 6:12 appears to contradict the later description of the ancestors who “died in faith, not having received the promise” (11:13; cf. 11:39). Attempts to resolve the contradiction have largely ignored that the focus of the passage is less on the content of the promise than on the fact that God swore, and that Abraham was a model of the πίστις and μακροθυμία required of the readers.
in 6:17-20, leaving the story of Abraham behind. According to the general principle, which the
author shares with Philo, “people swear by something greater, and beyond all dispute an oath is
for confirmation (βεβαίωσις).” This general principle applies to human interactions, especially
to the courts, where βεβαίωσις is a legal term for the guarantee of an oath. As the author’s
frequent use of forms of βεβαι- indicates (cf. 2:2-3; 3:6, 14; 6:16, 19; 9:17; 13:9), βεβαίωσις is
the critical need for those who waver because of unfulfilled promises. Consequently, the oath is
of critical importance to the author, as the three citations of divine oaths suggest (cf. 3:11; 6:14;
7:20-22).

As the application of the general principle in 6:17-20 indicates, those who need
βεβαίωσις, are “fugitives” (καταφυγόντες) in need of an anchor (6:18). Like Abraham, “the
heirs of the promise” (6:17) have received the divine oath (6:17-20) as a guarantee. If the oath
in the court of law provides confirmation (6:16), the divine oath is especially (περισσότερον)
certain, for it is the evidence of the “unchangeability of God’s will.” Thus “through two
unchangeable things” the “fugitives” may have “strong encouragement” (ισχυρὰν παράκλησιν)
to grasp the hope that is set before them. They discover βεβαίωσις in the anchor of the soul that
is firm and secure (ἀσφαλὴ καὶ βεβαιὰν). Mixing the metaphors the author describes the anchor
as “entering behind the curtain” separating heaven and earth, where the forerunner has entered,

24 See the extended discussion of God’s swearing “by himself” (cf. Gen 22:16) in Philo,
Leg. All. 3.203-207; Post. Cain 92-94; Sac. 94; Abr. 273; Spec. Leg. 2.253. Unless otherwise
noted, translations of Philo are from LCL.

25 BDAG, 173.

26 Μεσιτέων a hapax legomenon in the NT, is a legal term, “to guarantee.” BDAG, 634.
The term anticipates the appellation of Jesus as μεσίτης in 7:1-10:18 (cf. 8:6; 9:15; 12:24).
becoming high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (6:20).

The anchor, a metaphor used nowhere else in Scripture, was a common image of hope. The readers receive βεβαιωσις, not in the fulfillment of God’s promises, but in the divine oath that guarantees the promise. In the entry of the forerunner into the heavenly world, the listeners have received the irrevocable promise that they will ultimately enter into God’s rest. While they do not see “all things in subjection to him,” they have an anchor to grasp. The one who became high priest after the order of Melchizedek (κατὰ τὴν τάξιν Μελχισέδεκ ἄρχερευς γενόμενος) in the past (6:20) is eternal (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα). This assurance indicates that 7:1-10:18 is an elaboration of the promise that the disoriented readers can grasp as a result of the Christ event. This claim introduces the cultic section of 7:1-10:18, indicating that this elaboration of the community’s confession is the promise of God.

Although 7:1-10:18 has been the focus of studies of both the christology and soteriology of Hebrews, these topics cannot be separated from the crucial significance of the promise, which the author mentions three times in this section (7:6; 8:6; 9:15), in addition to the synonyms. The author establishes that believers have “better promises” (8:6) insofar as the death of Jesus establishes the conditions by which “those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (9:15).” Thus both Christology and soteriology are the foundation for the reception of the promise.

Two inclusios shape the argument of 7:1-10:18, indicating the author’s focus in this

27Stobaeus records an aphorism of Socrates, according to which the securing of a boat with a weak anchor is the equivalent of basing one’s hopes on a false understanding (Stobaeus, Anthology 3.2.45; cf. 4.46.22). See also Plutarch, Exilio 601-06; cf. Heliodorus, Aethiopica 7.24.4, “Hope is an anchor.”
section. In the first *inclusio*, the exaltation of Christ (6:19-20; 10:11-12), expressed in the language of Ps 110:1 (cf. 8:1; 10:11-12), provides the setting for the argument, which consists of the ontological distinction between two levels of priesthood, cult, and sacrifice. The second *inclusio*, formed by εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (6:20) and εἰς τὸ διηνεκές (10:14; cf. 7:3) and drawn from Ps 110:4, suggests the importance of the eternity of the son for the author’s understanding of the promise in Hebrews. Existing above the world of mortality and incompleteness, the heavenly high priest abides forever. The phrase reiterates the earlier claim that the exalted son is εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα (1:8; cf. Ps 44:7 LXX) and abides (διαμένεις, 1:11), in contrast to the mutable angels and the creation (1:7-12). Moreover, his sacrifice was εἰς τὸ διηνεκές (10:12-14). The author expresses little concern to speculate about the mysterious figure of Melchizedek in chapter 7, but focuses on the fact that he “abides forever” (μένει εἰς τὸ διηνεκές), unlike the Aaronic priests (cf. 7:16, 23-25, 28) who are prevented by death from remaining (7:23). While the priesthood of Aaron changed (7:12), the priest after the order of Melchizedek belongs to an “order” (τάξις, 7:11, 17) that is not subject to change. Because he is εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα, his sacrifice is (ἐφ’)ἀπαξ (7:27; 9:26-27). That is, he was exalted above the sphere of time into the sphere of timelessness.

The author reinforces the eternity of the high priest, referring to the oath for the third time in the homily (cf. 3:11; 6:14) and continuing the focus on the oath in 6:17-20. The high priesthood of Melchizedek was “not without an oath” (ὅρκομοσήμας, 7:20). Citing Ps 110:4 fully, he focuses on the divine oath as the basis for the eternity of the son (7:20-22): “The Lord

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28 The author renders the LXX εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα into the more elegant εἰς τὸ διηνεκές in 7:3; 10:12.
has sworn and will not change his mind: You are a priest εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα.” God’s promise is irrevocable (cf. 6:17, ἀμετάκλητος). Indeed, arguing from silence, he distinguishes between “the word of the oath” (7:28) and the law, suggesting that the latter was not accompanied by an oath. Unlike the levitical priesthood, which was subject to change (7:11-19), the word in Jesus Christ is the “word of the oath” (7:28). The promise has not been fulfilled, but God has given his oath in the death and exaltation of Christ.

In addition to the interchangeable terms oath and promise, the author introduces διαθήκη, which is scarcely distinguishable from the oath and promise. Christ became both the “surety (Ἐγγύς) of a better covenant” (7:22) and the mediator (μεσίτης) of a better covenant (8:6; 9:15; cf. 12:24), which is established on better promises (8:6). The terms Ἐγγύς and μεσίτης are legal terms for the guarantee of the promise, continuing the legal terminology employed in the claim that God “guaranteed (ἐμείστεσεν) the oath and promise in the work of Christ. The author interprets the new covenant (Jer 31:31-34) in cultic terms with a special emphasis on the promise, “I will remember their sins no more” (8:12; 10:17). This promise is developed in 9:1-10:18, which describes the finality and eternity of the sacrifice of Christ. Like the oath and the promise, the διαθήκη requires a guarantee of the future. Thus, while the readers do not see the final triumph of God, the guaranteed promise is the secure anchor that they may hold. They have received the purification for sins in the past and the guarantee for the future.

The community has access to the heavenly world in worship, even if it does not yet see the eschatological triumph.

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29BDAG, 271, 634.

30BDAG, 634.
The repeated use of κρείττων to describe the “better hope” (7:19), “better covenant” (7:22; 8:6), and “better promises” (8:6) corresponds to the consistent distinction between the two levels of reality, for the term is used to compare two levels of reality (cf. 1:4; 6:9; 11:16; 12:24). The “better promises” (8:6) belong to the transcendent world, which the exalted Christ has opened up to them.

After the description of the heavenly liturgy (9:1-14), the author concludes that the readers may “inherit the promises” (9:15). Thus the death of Christ is the presupposition for the availability of the promise. The content of God’s promise is the believers’ entry into the heavenly sanctuary, the corollary to the entry into God’s rest. God’s oath that the son is eternal is also the guarantee of the promise to the community, for the entry of the high priest into the sanctuary opens the way for those who follow (cf. 10:19).

In the description of the promise in 4:14-10:31, the author assumes the eschatological view of the two ages, maintaining that the Christ event is an occasion within history that marks the turn of the ages (cf. 6:5). As in 1:1-2, God has spoken in the Christ event, promising that the exalted Lord is eternal. The author also anticipates the coming of the day (10:25) of the return of Christ (9:27-28). However, the author focuses on the exaltation of the son to the transcendent world and the expectation that the readers will also enter. The content of the promise is that the son is eternal, and that believers will share in his eternity.


In the peroratio, which begins in 10:32, the author brings together the earlier arguments into a final exhortation that clarifies the problem of the unseen. The greatest concentration of references to the promise and its synonyms appears in the list of patriarchs in chapter 11, which
the author introduces with his working definition of faith in 11:1. The definition of faith as ἐλπιζομένων ὑπόστασις and ἔλεγχος οὗ βλέπομένων resumes the basic question of the homily (2:8b) and addresses the readers’ most urgent concern: the problem of what remains unseen. Having anticipated chapter 11 with numerous references to faith (3:2, 5, 12, 19; 4:2; 6:12; 10:22, 39) as the appropriate response to the promise, the author defines πίστις in a way that looks back to the preceding argument and forward to the list of patriarchs in chapter 11. The definition is a window into the author’s understanding of the promise.

The “things that are hoped for” and “things not seen” are the promises that stand before the community in the first ten chapters: the triumph of the son (1:5-13), the entry into God’s rest (4:1-11), and the ministry of the heavenly high priest in the heavenly sanctuary (7:1-10:18). Although the two expressions overlap, they are not precisely parallel, for “the things that are hoped for” are the promises that will be fulfilled in the future, while the “things not seen” are the eternal realities that exist in the transcendent world, which the author has described in 7:1-10:18. The latter phrase evokes the distinction among Platonists between the visible and invisible realities, which also influenced Jewish literature. Plato (Resp. 650D; cf. 7.524D; Phaedo 79A) speaks of the two realities, the visible (ὁρατόν) and the intelligible (νοητόν). Albinus (Alcinous) mentions the two components of reality from which the world is made (Didask. 13.1), ὁρατόν καὶ ἀπτόν, ἡ δὲ ἀορατός τε καὶ ἀφανής. The same distinction appears in Wisdom, which describes the visible creation as τὰ βλέπομενα (13:7).

The author returns to the Platonic distinction in 11:27 in the description of God as the

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31On the function of definitions in rhetorical discourse, see Christian Rose, Die Wolke der Zeugen, 93-98.
invisible one (ὁ ἄορατος), using the term that never appears in the LXX, but was common among Middle Platonists, including Philo, who employs the term ἄορατος more than one hundred times to describe God, the soul, and the heavenly world. This distinction is evident in the contrast in 11:3 between what is visible (τὸ βλεπόμενον) and what is not visible (μὴ ἐκ φανομένων). It also corresponds to the author’s fondness for negatives to describe the transcendent world, which is “not made with hands” (9:11, 24), “untouchable” (cf. 12:18, 22), and unshakable (12:27-28). This use of the α-privative for describing the deity and the intelligible world was a characteristic of Middle Platonism.32

While the definition of faith as ὑπόστασις and ἔλεγχος is a challenge to translators, both words emphasize the theme of the certainty and stability of the unseen reality. Ὕπόστασις, derived from ὑφίσταμαι (literally “stand under”), can mean reality (cf. 1:3; 3:14), realization, foundation, or standing firm (German feststehen).33 The context suggests that one cannot distinguish sharply among the proposed meanings, for the word suggests both the solid foundation and the act of taking a firm stand.34 Indeed, the description of the listeners’ early experience offers a commentary on the definition in 11:1. They had endured, “knowing” (γινώσκοντες) that they had “a better and abiding possession” (10:34) than the material goods that they had given up. This contrast suggests that the “better and abiding possession” is


33BDAG, 1041.

34Grässer, Hebräer, 3.95.

35Rose, Wolke der Zeugen, 100-01.
equivalent to “things hoped for” and “things unseen.” “Knowing” suggests the meaning of “realization” for ὑπόστασις. However, the author continues the exhortation, contrasting faith (i.e., endurance) with shrinking back (11:39). This description suggests that faith involves taking a firm stand on the object of hope.

The description of faith as ἔλεγχος continues the author’s focus on the certainty of “things not seen (cf. 6:19-20).” Thus the author’s response to the community’s crisis is to insist that reality is not in visible and tangible things, but in the unseen world. He employs Platonic assumptions for a pastoral purpose.

The author anticipates this working definition with examples of those who stood before the unseen promises. The ancestors in the wilderness failed to enter the promised heavenly κατάπαυσις because of ἀπιστία (3:12, 19). “Things hoped for” and “things not seen” include the promise of the heavenly κατάπαυσις and participation in God’s primordial rest as well as the work of Christ in the sanctuary not made with hands. All that the author has described remains unseen. The listeners themselves endured abuse and the confiscation of their property because they knew that they had an abiding possession (10:32-34), the equivalent of “things hoped for” and “things not seen.”

This working definition becomes the leitmotif in the description of heroes, all of whom shared the insecurity of the readers. The author employs a variety of words to describe “things hoped for” and “things unseen.” As the general statement indicates, to have faith is to believe that God rewards those who seek him (11:6). Noah believed in “things not yet seen” (11:7) and became an heir (11:7). Abraham went out looking for an inheritance (κληρονομία) and

36BDAG, 315 indicates that ἔλεγχος refers to the evidence for the proof of something.
sojourned in the land of promise with Isaac and Jacob (11:9), the “heirs of the promise” (11:10). The promise was the equivalent for the city (πόλις, 11:10, 16; cf. 12:22; 13:14) and homeland (πατρία, 11:14). Moses looked to the reward (11:26) and went out as “seeing the invisible” (11:27).

The patriarchs are the models for the readers, who also await a heavenly city (12:22; 13:14). The voice from heaven has promised (12:26) the shaking of heaven and earth, leaving only the abiding and unshakable reality, the equivalent to the city that “has foundations, whose maker and builder is God” (cf. 11:10), and God’s primordial rest (cf. 4:4-9). The author reshapes the traditional eschatological expectation, assuming the two levels of reality that have been a major theme of the homily. Those things that have been made will pass away, but the transcendent reality remains for the readers to receive (12:28). At the conclusion of the homily, the author urges the readers to “go out” (13:13) into the insecurity of the place outside the camp, following Jesus. Like Abraham (cf. 11:8), they go out to the homeless existence because they anticipate the abiding city. Abraham, the stranger in the world, is the model for believers.

Unfulfilled Promises and a People on the Way

Ernst Käsemann observed that the community’s experience of unfulfilled promises results in an existence characterized by “Wanderschaft.” While this term is not employed in Hebrews and has no precise English equivalent, it is an appropriate image for the author’s consistent description of the readers as people without a homeland. As the author indicated in

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the first ten chapters, those who do not see God’s triumph follow their pioneer (ἅρχηγός, 2:10; 12:2) and forerunner (πρόδρομος, 6:20) through the wilderness of their present existence to the heavenly world, but they have not arrived (2:10-18; 6:18-20). They are “refugees” (καταφύγόντες, 6:18) looking for an anchor in danger of “drifting away” (cf. παραρρέωμεν, 2:1), as in rushing water. Indeed, the entire setting of the homily presupposes the wilderness experience, as the tabernacle imagery (9:1-10:18) and the comparison of the heavenly mountain with Sinai (12:18-19) suggest. The wilderness experience indicates the community’s separation from the world in heaven that the author portrays. This imagery becomes especially important in the portrayal of the patriarchs, who are the models of living and dying with the unfulfilled promise (11:13-16, 39) of a homeland. The author’s use of philosophical language becomes most evident in his interpretation of the problem of the unseen.

* A Home for Refugees and Pilgrims

The corollary to the search for the invisible homeland is the existence of the patriarchs as migrants and outsiders, the most basic characteristic of the heroes in chapter 11. In recalling that Abraham “sojourned” (παρῴκησεν, 11:9) and that the patriarchs were “strangers and sojourners” (ξένοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι, 11:13), the author echoes the LXX’s description of Abraham as the nomad par excellence. The LXX consistently employs forms of παροικεῖν to describe the nomadic existence of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses (Gen. 12:10; 17:8; 19:9; 40)


41 BDAG, 779, “to inhabit a place as a foreigner.”
20:1; 21:23, 34; 24:37; 26:3; 28:4; 32:5; 35:27; 36:7; 37:1; 47:4; Exod 2:22). Moses named his son Gershom because Moses was himself a πάροικος in the land (Exod 2:22). Indeed, the defining narratives of Israel involve the theme of the existence of Israel in a foreign land: the exodus from Egypt, the wilderness wanderings, and the exile. The Israelites identified their history with “a wandering Aramaen” (Deut. 26:5), who “sojourned” (παρῴκησεν) in Egypt. These narratives had a special significance for Israelites who lived outside the promised land. Both 1 Peter and Hebrews follow this tradition, giving a positive interpretation to the patriarchs’ existence as strangers and aliens for the sake of readers who were πάροικοι, not because they were literally non-citizens, but because they were alienated from their communities as a result of their confession (cf. 1 Pet 1:1, 17; 2:11).

After describing Noah as the outsider who “condemned the world” (11:7; cf. 11:38), the author of Hebrews devotes an extended section to Abraham, heightening the emphasis on his existence as a stranger. Just as the κατάπαυσις in 4:1-11 was no longer the promised land

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43Reinhard Feldmeier has shown that the narratives about strangers had a special significance for those who also lived as strangers. The accent on the patriarchs as strangers is a special theme of the Priestly document, which was written during the exile, when Israel appeared to be at an end as a nation. In retelling the story of Abraham, the writer emphasized that the patriarchs also were strangers looking for a promise. Jews who lived inside the land of promise did not accent this theme, while those who lived as minority communities gave a positive interpretation to the memory of Israel’s ancestors as strangers Reinhard Feldmeier, “The ‘Nation’ of Strangers: Social Contempt and its Theological Interpretation in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity,” Ethnicity and the Bible, Biblical Interpretation Series 19 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 243.

44According to Gen 23:4 LXX, Abraham says, “I am a stranger and resident alien (ζένος καὶ παρεπιδήμος) among you (μεθ’ ὑμῶν).”
expected by Israel, the κληρονομία (11:8) that Abraham seeks is no longer the κληρονομία in the land. His role as a stranger is evident in the repetition of the verbs ἔξελθειν/ἔξῆλθεν (11:8) and the reminder that the patriarchs lived in tents (11:9). Even in the land of promise, he was an alien (ἄλλοτρία, 11:9; cf. Philo, Her. 26). The same theme of alienation is evident in the description of Moses’ suffering and departure from Egypt (11:25-26) and culminates in the summary of the patriarchs’ existence in 11:38-39: They wandered around in mountains and caves and holes in the ground, and the world was not worthy of them.

The new dimension of the patriarchs’ exile existence is that they were not only “strangers and resident aliens” (ξένοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι, 11:13; cf. Gen 23:4), but “strangers and aliens on the earth” (ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, 11:13). Γῆ is not the promised land, as in Genesis, but the earth itself. They were thus not only outsiders in a sociological sense, but in an ontological sense as well. Thus they are illustrations of the working definition of faith in 11:1. The believer never attains the fulfillment of the promise on earth, but only sees it from afar (11:13; cf. Deut 34:4). Consequently, the ancestors died in faith, not receiving the promises (11:13, 39). For them, as for the readers of Hebrews, the fulfillment of the promise remains unseen.

The author’s description of the patriarchs as strangers and resident aliens corresponds to his earlier description of the readers as “fugitives” (6:19) and his reference to their own marginalization (cf. 10:32-34), suggesting that the ancestors are the models for the readers’ own approach to the problem of the unseen and unfulfilled promises. While the author’s description of faithful people as fugitives, strangers, and resident aliens employs the vocabulary of

45 Knut Backhaus, “Das Land der Verheißung: Glaubenden im Hebräerbrief,” 175.
46 Eisele, Ein unerschütterliches Reich, 383.
Scripture, it also resonates with the philosophical literature that extends from the pre-Socratics to the Platonic tradition, where it is employed for the individual’s separation from the transcendent world. According to Democritus (fr c7), “As people recognize that they have only a brief lifetime in comparison to eternity, so they have a most beautiful life . . as in a foreign land (παρεπιδημία).” Empedocles, who was influenced by Pythagoras, describes his life as a flight and a vagabond existence (φυγὰς θεόθεν καὶ ἄλλητις) in which one is constantly on the way in a hostile, strange, environment because one belongs to a better world of the gods. According to Theatetus, Socrates said, “Therefore we ought to flee (φυγεῖν) from earth to the dwelling place of the Gods as fast as we can. This flight (φυγή) is to become like God in every way that we can (176ab).”

In the Phaedo, Socrates explains that his death is an ἀποδημία, a wandering from a strange land (61e; cf. 67c). According to Ps.-Plato, Socrates says, when called to the deathbed of Asiochos, “Life is only a temporary residence (παρεπιδημία).” Aelius Aristides describes heaven as one’s homeland (πατρίδα τὴν οὐρανόν). Similarly, Porphyry speaks of the individual’s exile (ἀποδημία) from heaven (Marc. 5).

The description of the readers as fugitives (καταφυγόντες, 6:19) is reminiscent of a common theme in the philosophical literature. Several philosophers and other writers, including Plutarch of Chaeronea and Philo of Alexandria, wrote books or speeches with the title Περὶ

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48 Frg. 115; cited in Feldmeier, Die Christen als Fremde, 29.

49 Ps. Plato, Ax. 365.
David Runia, “The Theme of Flight and Exile in the Allegorical Thought-World of Philo of Alexandria,” StPhAnnual 21 (2009), 1. In addition to Philo and Plutarch, Teles of Megara (long excerpt in Stob, Flor. 3.40.8); Dio, Or. 13; Favorinus of Arles (partly preserved as Vatic. Pap. 11 (see DphA 3.422).

50 Plutarch wrote de Exilio (περὶ φυγῆς) to encourage a friend who had been exiled. He insisted that “there is no such thing as a native land” (600E). Citing Empedocles’s words, “I too a wanderer (φυγάς) and exile (ἄλητης) from heaven” (607D), he added that “All of us . . . are sojourners (μετανάστατας) and strangers (ξένους) and exiles (φυγάδας).” Philo described life in the body as an exile from heaven, encouraging his reader, “Depart you here, from the earthly matter that surrounds you, escaping (ἐκφυγόν) from that foulest prison, the body, and from its pleasures and desires that are like jailers with all your might and strength (Mig 9).” No place is really home, for the soul is in exile.

Plotinus employs the nautical metaphor to indicate this insecurity in his comments on the words of Odysseus (Homer, Il. 2.140), “Let us flee into the beloved homeland.” Plotinus adds, “In what does this flight consist? We are in the sea like Odysseus . . . in a flight from the sorcerer Circe or from Calypso. . . . There is our fatherland, from which we come and there is our father” (On the Beautiful 2.6.8.39). According to David Runia, the theme of Odysseus the wanderer, buffeted by the storms and tribulations of the earthly and bodily reality until he finds his way to his fatherland, the heavenly and spiritual realm, is an important theme in Platonic philosophy.

51 Philo’s knowledge of this tradition is evident in his advice that his reader should steer clear “of smoke and wave” (Od. 12.219) and run away from the ridiculous pursuits of

50David Runia, “The Theme of Flight and Exile in the Allegorical Thought-World of Philo of Alexandria,” StPhAnnual 21 (2009), 1. In addition to Philo and Plutarch, Teles of Megara (long excerpt in Stob, Flor. 3.40.8); Dio, Or. 13; Favorinus of Arles (partly preserved as Vatic. Pap. 11 (see DphA 3.422).

mortal life as from that terrifying Charybdis, not touching it even with the tip of your toe (Somn. 2.270).\textsuperscript{52} We do not have an explicit reference to such an allegory until much later (Numeniusius, as reported by Porphyry).\textsuperscript{53}

The nautical imagery of human existence as life in a tumultuous river (cf. Heb. 6:19-20) is also a common theme in the philosophical literature. Stobaeus cites an aphorism of Socrates, “To secure boat with weak anchor and to have hope on false judgment” (Stob. 3.2.4.5). Employing the imagery of flight and seafaring, Plutarch says that one must have good sense and reason, as a skipper needs an anchor that he may moor at any haven. Those who are hanging upon the future and longing for what they do not have are tossed about on hope as on a raft (606e; cf. Heb 6:19). Philo speaks of life’s river (Fug. 49) and of the desire of all those who are beloved by God to fly from the “stormy waters of engrossing business with its perpetual turmoil of surge and billows and anchor in the calm safe shelter of virtue’s roadsteads (Somn. 2.225).”

At the center of Philo’s thought is the understanding of human existence as migration to the heavenly homeland.\textsuperscript{54} Philo anticipated the author of Hebrews in appropriating the Greek concept of human existence as temporary residence into the retelling of the Genesis story. The soul of the wise individual follows the path “from the flesh to the spirit, from the material world with its darkness and passions to the light of the intelligible world, from slavery in Egypt to

\textsuperscript{52}Cited in Runia, “Flight and Exile,” 21.

\textsuperscript{53}Numenius, fr. 60 (=Porphyry, De antro 6).

\textsuperscript{54}Valentin Nikiprowetzky, Le commentaire de l’Écriture chez Philon d’Alexandrie; son caractère et sa portée; observations philologiques, ALGH 11 (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 239.
freedom in Canaan, land of virtue or city of God.” \(^{55}\) Commenting on the reminder that the Israelites are only aliens and tenants in the land owned by God (Lev 25:23), he adds that “each of us has come into this world (κόσμος) as into a foreign city, and in this city he does but sojourn (παροικεῖν) until he has exhausted his span of life” (Cher 120), indicating that every created being is a sojourner and alien (Cher. 121).

A common theme in Philo’s writings is that Abraham is the sojourner par excellence. In De migratione Abrahami Philo offers a radical interpretation of Abraham’s departure from his land and kin. “Land” means “body” and “kinship” means “sense-perception,” both of which he must leave behind. \(^{56}\) The language used for the body is very strong: “Depart you here, from the earthly matter that surrounds you, escaping (ἐκφυγόν) from that foulest prison, the body, and from its pleasures and desires that are like jailers with all your might and strength (Migr. 9).” He returns to this theme elsewhere (Her. 267), arguing that God does not permit humankind to dwell in the body as if in a homeland, for God permits one to sojourn here, as in a foreign country. It is the fool who mistakes the body for the homeland and attempts to dwell rather than to sojourn (παροικεῖν).

In De confusione linguarum, Philo turns to Gen 11:2 as the basis for his comments on the importance of the temporary residence on earth for the people of faith. The wicked of Gen 11:2 live on the plain “as though it were their fatherland (ὁς ἐν πατρίδα).” They did not sojourn there as if on foreign soil, but decided to stay permanently. By contrast, the wise are called sojourners (παροικοῦντες), for their life in the body is temporary. The heavenly region is their


native land (πατρίς), and the earthly region is a foreign country in which they are sojourners (78). Thus Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are called sojourners (76-82). Like the author of Hebrews, Philo insists that the strangers in the land have a better city or country. Jacob’s temporary residence with Laban is symbolic of the soul’s expectation of a city (de Som. 1.46; cf. Som. 1.46; 2.250). In Her. 26, Abraham asks, “Am I not a wanderer (μετανάστης) from my country, an outcast, an alien from my father’s house. Do not all men call me excommunicate, exile, desolate and disenfranchised? Thou art my country (ἡ πατρίς).”

Philo contrasts Abraham and Cain, both of whom “went out” (Gen 4:16; 12:1-2), but in the opposite direction. Philo comments on Cain’s exile, indicating that Cain went to the place called σαλώς, or “tossing.” He adds that the foolish man is subject to tossing and tumult, like the sea lashed by contrary winds when a storm is raging and never has quietness or calm (Post. Cain 22). He devotes an essay to stories of flight (φυγή) in which he speaks of the “torrent of life’s river” and the need to find a safe haven in the house of wisdom rather than be overwhelmed by raging waters (Fug. 49-50).

Reinhard Feldmeier has noted the correlation between social alienation and the ontological description of the stranger and alien. Philo’s frequent statements about the estrangement of the wise is occasioned considerably by the estrangement of the Jews in Alexandrian society. Philo recalls the persecution of Jews among Alexandrian nationalists and

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58 Feldmeier, Christen als Fremde, 68.
Flaccus’s comment that the Jews are “strangers and foreigners” (ξένοι καὶ ἐπήλυδες). Philo offers a positive view of this condition by providing an ontological perspective, according to which the heroes of faith recognize their true homeland in heaven. Similarly, the author of Hebrews addresses the fundamental question of the readers by placing their own estrangement within a metaphysical context. His description of his readers as refugees (καταφυγόντες, 6:19) evokes the familiar image from philosophical literature. While his imagery of flight and homelessness does not carry all of the associations that these images had among the philosophers and the works of Philo, the author agrees with his contemporaries in describing human existence as a transient life on earth in anticipation of a transcendent homeland. To live without seeing the triumph of Christ belongs to the very nature of faith itself.

Epistemology, Faith, and the Promise

In his comment that faith is “the evidence of things not seen,” the author returns to the basic issue facing the readers, who say, “We do not see everything in subjection to him.” In chapter 11, he provides a solution to this problem, offering an epistemology by which they can experience the unseen reality. He anticipates this resolution in his description of the readers’ past experience when they endured the loss of their property, knowing that they had a better and abiding possession (10:34). The elaboration on the definition of faith in 11:3 also points to the resolution: “By faith we know (πιστεύομεν) that the worlds were created by the word of God, so that what is seen was made from things that do not appear.” That is, faith has its own

59 Flac. 54; cited ibid. 67.

60 The negative μὴ can refer to the entire clause or to ἐκ φανομένων. Cf. BDF, 433 (3). The meaning remains the same in either case. Cf. Grässer, Hebräer, 3.109.
epistemology by which the believer knows what is real. The author’s use of ἰόοημαν in 11:3 suggests that only in thinking do we recognize that behind the visible stands this invisible reality.\(^{61}\) It concerns knowledge, which is made possible and mediated through faith. This epistemology is reminiscent of the Platonic argument that the invisible realities are known only by the ὑντ.\(^{62}\)

The author describes this epistemology also with the imagery of seeing. For example, the patriarchs “died in faith, not having received the promise, but having seen it from a distance” (11:13). The visual imagery is most clearly stated in the description of Moses, who chose the afflictions of the Christ rather than the treasures of Egypt because “he saw the reward” (11:26). He then endured the loss of the security of Egypt, going out “as seeing the invisible one” (11:27). This statement is the author’s commentary on the definition of faith as “evidence of things not seen” (11:1).\(^{63}\) Not only do believers know a reality beyond the senses, but those who “do not see the world in subjection to him” can see invisible realities.

In light of the biblical theme that no one can see God and live (Deut 33:20),\(^{64}\) the


\(^{62}\)Cf. Plato, *Tim*. 28A, 52, “indefinable forms which it is the province of reason (ὑντος) to contemplate.” Cf. *Phaed*. 79A, “things that are always the same are grasped by reason.”

\(^{63}\)Grässer, *Hebräer*, 3.124

\(^{64}\)Biblical verses vary on the way they present the experience of seeing God. While some verses indicate that humans are not permitted to see God (cf. Exod 33:20), others indicate that God appeared to individuals. According to Gen 12:7 and 17:11, “And the Lord appeared to (was seen by) Abraham.” According to Gen 32:25-33, Jacob says, “I have seen God face to face.” Nowhere is God described as invisible. See Ellen Birnbaum, *The Place of Judaism in Philo’s Thought: Israel, Jews, and Proselytes*, Brown Judaic Studies 290; Studia Philonica Monographs 2 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 78.
description of Moses “as seeing the invisible one” is noteworthy.\textsuperscript{65} The language of “seeing the invisible (one)” resonates with the language of Platonic epistemology, which Philo also adapted into the biblical narrative. For Plato, the instrument for seeing the divine is the eye of the soul (\textit{Resp. 7. 533D}), which is better than 10,000 eyes, for with it alone the truth is perceived (\textit{Resp. 7. 527}). Plato speaks of that place beyond the heavens that reason can behold; all true knowledge is knowledge thereof. It is visible only to the mind (\textit{Phaedr. 247}). Plato says, “We assume two kinds of existence, visible and invisible—things that are always the same can be grasped only by reason (\textit{Phaedo 79}). He speaks specifically of the ascent of the soul to a vision of the existent (τὸ ὄν), which is visible only to the mind, the pilot of the soul (\textit{Phaed. 246e-247e, 249c}). The vision of God becomes a common theme in the Platonic tradition.\textsuperscript{66} According to Alcinous, “God is ineffable and comprehensible only by the intellect” (10.6).

Philo, who uses the term \textit{ἀόρατος} more than one hundred times for God, employs the Platonic language for seeing God on numerous occasions. He describes what is beyond matter as “beyond sight” (\textit{Post. Cain 15}) and God as the one who cannot be seen (\textit{Post. Cain 16}). If even Moses was incapable of seeing God (\textit{Mut. 7-9}), then only the most arrogant person “will boast of seeing the invisible God” (\textit{QE 2.37}) because an ontological gulf separates humankind from God.\textsuperscript{67} “By his very nature God is invisible and incomprehensible, and thus the deity cannot be

\textsuperscript{65}The expression ως ὁρῶν indicates the paradoxical nature of faith (Grässer, \textit{Hebräer}, 174). “Seeing the invisible” implies the use of other means of perception, as the parallels indicate. Cf. Marcus Aurelius, “Let us see (ὁρῶμεν), not with the eyes (10:26).” According to Aristotle, \textit{de Mundo} 399a, the deity is described as ἀόρατος except to reason (λογισμός).

\textsuperscript{66}See Wolfson, “Albinus and Plotinus,” 126-29.

seen” by created beings (Mut. 9; Post 168; Conf. Ling. 138), “for we have in us no organ by which we can envisage the Existent One, neither in sense . . . nor in mind” (Mut 7; cf. also Det. 86-87).68

Despite the ontological chasm between God and humankind, Philo maintains that people of faith may see the invisible one. For example, Cain had no conception of the existent one, “having deliberately blinded the organ by which alone he could have seen him” (Post. Cain 21). Philo contrasts Cain with the one “to whom it is given to gaze and soar beyond not only material but all immaterial things and to take God as his whole stay and support . . . and a faith unswerving (ἀκλινοῦς) and securely founded (βεβαιοτάτης, Praem 30). He describes God’s creation of one great city as a model for the creation, a “world discernible only by the mind” and the pattern for the world that our senses perceive” (Opif. 19). Through wisdom the soul sees God and his potencies (Mut. Nom. 3). Philo speaks of “invisible conceptions perceived only by the mind, of which the others are copies open to our senses” (Ebr. 132; Abr 132). “When it sees the incomparable it does not yield to the counter-pull of things like itself” (Som. 2.227). Faith is the perpetual vision of the existent (Praem. 27). To believe in God is to disbelieve in all else, all that is created only to perish.

The people of faith, according to Philo, were able to see the invisible one. Abraham is the “virtuous person,” whose spiritual eyes are awake and see (QG 4.2). His “mind” is able to “form an impression with more open eyes and more lucid vision.” His “fully opened” mind then “runs toward the one” and he sees God as one who is clearly manifest, “directly visible” (4:4).69

68Ibid.

69Mackie, 41.
Moses entered into the darkness where God is, into the unseen, invisible, incorporeal and archetypal essence of things. There “he beheld what is hidden from the sight of moral nature” (Mos. 1.158).

The transformation of the traditional hope for the fulfillment of the promise is evident in the focus on the ancestors as strangers on earth whose epistemology of faith involved “seeing the invisible one.” This combination of themes indicates that the author’s portrayal of faithful people of the past is derived not only from his reading of the LXX, but also from the philosophical categories that he applies to the interpretation. This interpretation serves the pastoral purpose of interpreting the marginalization of those who do not see the triumph that they had expected. Like Jewish predecessors who also addressed the problem of marginalization, the author offers examples of other “fugitives” who did not find an answer on earth. To those who “do not see the world in subjection” (2:8), the author offers a new way of seeing.