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### Why Does the Epistle to the Hebrews Evoke the Desires of the Patriarchs?<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** The Pontifical Biblical Commission's document *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible*, calls attention to a threefold connection between the two parts of the Christian Bible: continuity, discontinuity, and newness. The paper offers an analysis of a passage as an example of this relationship. The Epistle to the Hebrews (11:8–22) gives a particular emphasis to the desires of the patriarchs among other attitudes of the heroes of faith. They were looking for what was promised to them and desired by them: a city with the solid foundations planned and built by God. Now these desires can be fulfilled: the everlasting life with God is offered to all who believe in Jesus Christ.

**Keywords:** Biblical theology, soteriology, Epistle to the Hebrews, patriarchs

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The answer to the question posed in the title illustrates the complex ties between both parts of the Christian Bible. The document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission *The Jewish People and their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible* (= JPSS), which defines the relations between the Old and the New Testament,

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<sup>1</sup> The present article is a corrected and supplemented version of the text originally published in Polish: Artur Malina, "Dlaczego List do Hebrajczyków przypomina o pragnieniach patriarchów?," *Collectanea Theologica* 88 (2018) no. 4, 125–138. Translated from Polish by Lingua Lab.

highlights three notions: continuity, discontinuity, and progression.<sup>2</sup> The first pair is treated asymmetrically in the conclusions to the central section of the document. Speaking of the continuity between the two parts of the Bible, the document mentions their key theological content.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, regarding the discontinuity between them, it points only to the material institutions of the old covenant.<sup>4</sup> Even though the Epistle to the Hebrews at no point

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<sup>2</sup> As the third aspect, it would be better to speak of newness, instead of progression. For the new content is not the result of necessary historical processes, but their emergence depends on Jesus and his work of redemption; cf. R.A. Harrisville, "The Concept of Newness in the New Testament," *JBL* 74, no. 2 (1955): 74–5 (who characterises the newness in relation to: continuity, contrast, and dynamic movement which depends on the work of Christ). In the Epistles of Paul, the apostle speaks of a "new creation" (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15); newness is the first characteristic of Jesus's public ministry (his teaching and works), voiced by his addressees (Mk 1:27).

<sup>3</sup> In the conclusions (JPSS 64–65) to the second part of the document—titled "Fundamental Themes in the Jewish Scriptures and Their Reception into Faith in Christ"—the themes shared by both parts of the Bible were indicated: the oneness of God and the fact that He created the universe; God's discourse and the election of the people; time and time again salvific work undertaken, which is directed both at the chosen people in history, and it has universal horizon open to the future. Faith does not receive a mention in the paragraph presenting the conclusions regarding continuity and discontinuity. An indirect mention of faith can be seen in the indication for the chosen people of "a way of faithfulness (Law)" ("*un chemin de fidélité [Loi]*") (JPSS 64). The same indirect reference to faith can be found in the reference to the church as comprising the Israelites who have accepted the new covenant and "other believers who have joined them" ("*d'autres croyants*") (JPSS 65). The only marked references to faith are to be found in the paragraph devoted to the notion of progression occurring between the two parts of the Bible: "The New Testament firmly holds on to the monotheistic faith of Israel: God remains the One"; "the Church is conscious of being given a universal horizon by Christ, in conformity with Abraham's vocation, whose descendants from now on are multiplied in a filiation founded on faith in Christ" (JPSS 65). These conclusions, however, do not feature any account of this progression with regard to faith at these two stages of the history of salvation.

<sup>4</sup> The document lists the following examples: "the levitical priesthood of the Jerusalem Temple; cultic forms like animal sacrifice; religious and ritual practices like circumcision, rules concerning purity and impurity, dietary prescriptions; imperfect laws such as divorce; restrictive legal interpretations concerning the Sabbath" (JPSS 64).

verbalises this tripartite relationship, it assumes its existence since the outset, even as regards the most crucial themes of theology.<sup>5</sup>

The multidimensional reference to the Old Testament comes to the fore in the eleventh chapter. In this exhaustive text, the author of the Epistle presents to his addressees the role models of faith in God. He does so on the example of figures from the past, referred to as the elders. He devotes most of his attention to the patriarchs, enumerated in a direct succession of generations, and he underscores their striving towards the same goal. The emphasis placed on their common desires proves significant for the determination of the newness of the faith of those who have believed in Christ, as opposed to the role models from the bygone days.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In its opening verses, the Epistle to the Hebrews presents two different addressees of a message of the same God: the ancestors, who He spoke to through the prophets; Christians, who he spoke to in the last days through the Son. Both discourses together constitute a single history of salvation in two stages. During the first stage of that history, the discourses are reiterated and differentiated, whereas at the second stage, a new, unprecedented quality emerges: God speaks in fullness through his Son. Even though much is different in these two messages, the reference to its former auditory as the ancestors (lit. fathers) indicates the continuity of the history of salvation also on the part of mankind. What was uttered long time ago has not been forgotten, but preserved until the present owing to the transmission of that message from generation to generation. The contemporaries were able to get to know the old discourse of God, because it had been heard, remembered and transmitted by ancestors.

<sup>6</sup> The bibliography regarding chapter eleven is extremely vast. We will limit ourselves here to the publications from the recent decade: R. Bogacz, "Wiara w Liście do Hebrajczyków," *ScrLum* 5 (2013): 247–57; N.T. Bott, "«And by Faith, Because Abraham Considered Him Faithful Who Had Promised, Sarah Herself Received Power to Conceive». A Reconsideration of Heb 11:11," *TJ* 32 (2011): 205–21; C.M. Cos, "An Example of the Power of Faith: Sarah, the Subject of Hebrews 11:11," *Priscilla Papers* 25, no. 1 (2011): 16–20; M.C. Easter, "Faith in the God who Ressurrects: Theocentric Faith of Hebrews," *NTS* 63, no. 1 (2017): 76–91 (esp. 87–91); L. Mateja, "Inicjacyjny charakter XI rozdziału Listu do Hebrajczyków," *VoxP* 69 (2018): 467–79; V. Scippa, "Barak: testimone della fede? (Eb 11, 32). Una riflessione," in: *La parola di Dio non è incatenata (2 Tm 2, 9)*, Fs. C. Marcheselli-Casale, ed. A. Pitta – G. Di Palma, Bologna 2012, 375–86; T. Thatcher, "Cain and Abel in Early Christian Memory. A Case Study in «The Use of the Old Testament in the New»,» *CBQ* 72, no. 4 (2010): 732–51.

## 1. The Elders as the Role Models of Faith

The patriarchs do not seem particularly recognised in this long text. There are others mentioned before them: Abel, Enoch, and Noah (11:1–7).<sup>7</sup> Lesser still are they distinguished by the moniker the “elders” (πρεσβύτεροι). Two other appellatives would seem more appropriate: “patriarchs” (πατριάρχαι), and “fathers” (πατέρες). However, throughout this text they are nowhere to be found, even though the author does use them in other sections of the Epistle.

The word “patriarchs” has positive connotations in one of the mentions. It is a rather particular case, because of its rhetorical function. In the singular, the term “patriarch” (πατριάρχης) appears in a single admonition situated in the long, doctrinal section of the letter. The author appeals to his readers to recognise and acknowledge the greatness of Melchizedek, who he juxtaposes with Abraham: “Consider, then, how great this one is, to whom even Abraham gave a tithe from the spoils, the patriarch!”<sup>8</sup> (Heb 7:4). The position of the noun πατριάρχης at the end of the sentence serves to underscore the greatness of the former against the backdrop of the dignity of the latter man.<sup>9</sup>

The noun “fathers” (πατέρες) might seem even more appropriate. After all what we are dealing with here are the models of faith in the sense of those assuming adequate attitude towards God and His words. At the outset of the Epistle, the term refers to the addressees of the older discourse of God. In two subsequent instances, it refers to the entire people of the old covenant—these being the citations from the Old Testament (3:9; 8:9), whereas in the two final ones it indicates human parents (11:23; 12:9). A closer analysis of these four instances indicates that the term does not work well as

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<sup>7</sup> The selection of these three figures known from the prehistory of mankind means that neither Abraham, nor much less Isaac, Jacob or Joseph are presented as more significant than others. In that sense, Abraham is described as a leader by L. Jambois, “The Teaching and Spirituality of the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *Life of the Spirit* 9, no. 99 (1954): 115.

<sup>8</sup> All translations of biblical passages are my own (A.M.).

<sup>9</sup> This rhetorical effect resulting from the separation between the name and the title was pointed out by C.C. Caragounis, *New Testament Language and Exegesis. A Diachronic Approach*, Tübingen 2014, 284–5.

a reference to all those aspects mentioned in chapter eleven. In the first two of these, it is used with negative undertones, and hence inappropriate as an indication of the role models of faith for Christians, whereas in the following two its meaning is neutral, but inconsistent with all the examples drawn from the past.

In the first of the biblical quotations, the expression “your fathers” is directed at the Israelites, who during their travel through the desert put God to the test (Her 3:9; as cited in: Ps 94:7b–11 [= LXX 95:7b–11]). The pronoun “your” agrees in tone with God’s accusation, which expresses His obvious distancing Himself from the persons referred to therewith.<sup>10</sup> Of no less pejorative significance is the use of this noun in the second citation—this time accompanied by a pronoun in third person plural. Announcing through the prophet Jeremiah a new covenant for the house of Israel and the house of Judah, God differentiates it from the earlier covenant made with “their fathers” (Heb 8:8–9; as cited in Jer 31:31–32 [= LXX Jer 38:31–32]). We do not find any such markedly reserved references in the other two uses of pronouns. The first as the model of faith indicates the attitude of Moses’s parents: “By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child, and they did not fear the edict of the king” (Heb 11:23). In the other, the author infers from his listeners’ attitude towards their earthly parents as their tutors—the necessary relation to God as the Father of the faithful. “Furthermore, if we have had our fathers according to the flesh as disciplinarians, and we respected them, should we much more rather submit completely to the Father of spirits, and live?” (Heb 12:9).

The use of the word “fathers” would not be appropriate, for as the first example of faith the author lists Abel, who did not belong to the genuine lineage of ancestors (11:4). Besides, the category referred to with the term must also include women.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> It has a similarly negative sense in the mentions of the ancestors in: Matt 23:32; Luke 11:47–48; John 6:49; Acts 7:51–52; Acts 28:25. Against such backdrop, the exception can be found in the reminiscence of the covenant made by God with the ancestors in Acts 3:25.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. E. Grässer, *An die Hebräer*, vols. 1–3, Zürich, vol. 3, 100.

Only in part is the noun “elders”<sup>12</sup> synonymous with the reference to the addressees of the older discourse of God as ancestors.<sup>13</sup> The noun has been chosen due to its positive meaning in common usage. According to Philo, the title of *πρεσβύτεροι* is reserved for people worthy of respect and reverence (*Sobr.* 16; *Abr.* 270). The mention of these persons is reminiscent of a long enumeration and description, known as the Praise of the Fathers (Sir 44–50). The sapiential author, presenting a summary of the biblical history,<sup>14</sup> mentions the greatest heroes of the ancient Israel. The recollection of their example is intended to reinforce the faith of Jews yielding to the influence of Greek beliefs and philosophies. As opposed to their ancestors, who during their travel through the desert belonged to the generation hostile to the voice of God, all mentioned in this chapter are intended as role models of faith for the recipients of the word of God.<sup>15</sup> Denoting them all with the term “elders” is to evoke associations with persons enjoying authority. Thus, the use of the word is consistent with the function of the whole chapter as a reminder of the figures who should serve as role models. Besides this common expression and a significance congruent with it, the utterances about the patriarchs have an even more precise sense.

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<sup>12</sup> In the Epistle to the Hebrews, it appears only on this single occasion. Their parallel description as witnesses has its grounds in the fact that all of them—starting from Abel, Enoch, and Noah—receive from God a testimony (Heb 11:2.4.5.7.39), the other reason being that after they all have been listed, they are called witnesses (Heb 12:1).

<sup>13</sup> The meaning of these terms does not overlap, contrary to the claims made by numerous commentators: B.F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays*, London–New York 1889, 351; R.H. Smith, *Hebrews*, Minneapolis 1984, 139; H. Hegermann, *Der Brief an die Hebräer*, Berlin 1988, 225; C.-P. März, *Hebräerbrief*, Würzburg, 68; D.A. Hagner, *Hebrews*, Peabody 1990, 182.

<sup>14</sup> Similar instances of recaps of the biblical history are known from biblical texts and the writings of Judaism of the Second Temple period; besides the Praise of the Fathers in Sir 44–50, they can be found in: Deut 1–4; Ps 78; 105; 4 *Esd* 7:106–110; 3 *Macc* 2:2–20.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. G.L. Cockerill, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Grand Rapids 2012, 522–3.

## 2. The Patriarchs among the Elders

In the structure of chapter eleven, the patriarchs are not distinguished in any particular manner. The entire text appears to be rather homogenous owing to the repetition of the word “faith”<sup>16</sup> in a constant grammar form, and in the same figure of speech.<sup>17</sup> A multiple repetition of the same noun and a prevalence of a single grammar form further enhance the impression that the number of examples is much larger: it could be continued endlessly!<sup>18</sup> In this long series of ancestors no single primogenitor, no single group is presented as more significant than any other.

The passage about patriarchs constitutes a coherent unit among four paragraphs, its limits marked with the — typical for the Epistle — repetitions, particularly instances of an *inclusio*:<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The word πίστις is featured 24 times in this chapter, whereas throughout the entire Epistle—32 times.

<sup>17</sup> What is used as an anaphora is a form meaning “by faith.” The case of the noun πίστει has the function of *dativus causae* (18 times in 11:3.4.5.7.8.9.11.17.20.21.22.23.24.27.28.29.30.31; used in the same case was the word not placed in such a highlighted position in 4:2). There are two instances each of prepositional phrases “according to faith”—κατα πίστιν (11:7.13), and “through faith”—διὰ (τῆς) πίστεως (11:33.39), and a single one of “without faith”—χωρὶς δὲ πίστεως (11:6). These expressions are virtually not used apart from this section (with the exception of 6:12). Meanwhile, the noun reappears at the beginning of the following chapter (12:2). However, the latter mention is placed in the following section, which differs due to a change in the literary form, from an exposition to a parenthesis (12:1: “let us run”; 12:3: “for consider, . . . in order that you might not become weary”).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. M.R. Cosby, “The Rhetorical Composition of Hebrews 11,” *JBL* 107 (1988): 260–1. These examples are well known to the addressees of the Epistle, for they were drawn from the history ranging between the creation and the period separating both Testaments; cf. M.R. Miller, “What Is the Literary Form of Hebrews 11?” *JETS* 29 (1986): 412.

<sup>19</sup> Other proposals of a division, in spite of a declared consideration of the formal and rhetorical elements, are based to a larger extent on a rather questionable thematic fragmentation (for instance in A.D. Bulley, “Death and Rhetoric in the Hebrews «Hymn to Faith»,” *SR* 25 (1996): 411–12) or on searching for parallel motifs intended to create a chiasmic structure for the entire section (in that vein V. Rhee, “Chiasm and the Concept of Faith in Hebrews 11,” *BS* 155 (1998): 327–45). On the issue of rhetoric structure, see also M.R. Cosby, *The Rhetorical Composition and Function of Hebrews 11. In Light of Example Lists in Antiquity*, Macon 1988.

- 1–7: Faith and its first instantiations.
- 8–22: The faith of Abraham and the patriarchs.
- 23–31: The faith of Moses and the Israelites.
- 32–40: The faith of later witnesses.

The frame of the first paragraph is provided through a repetition of the verb meaning visual perception: “not seen” (11:1), and “not yet seen” (11:7). The fragment about the ancestors of God’s chosen people opens and ends with references to them migrating, which is marked by the verb “to go out” (11:8), and the noun “exodus” (11:22). The third paragraph (11:23–31) is composed of two parts: the first one about Moses (11:23–27), framed by the verbs “to see,” and “to be afraid,” as well as the noun “king”; the other about the Israelites leaving Egypt, made of utterances juxtaposing salvation of the faithful with the damnation of the unfaithful (11:28–31). The fourth passage (11:32–40) has as its internal frame a double use of the prepositional phrase “through faith” (11:33.39). Additionally, that paragraph also features external frames: on one side a paralipsis, attracting the reader’s attention to the possibility of continuation of the argument about ancestors as the role models of faith for Christians (11:32), while on the other hand the assertion that the aim desired by the ancestors, who were characterised as role models of faith, could not be achieved by them without Christians (11:39–40).

Even though the position of the second paragraph is not set apart within the structure of chapter eleven, the fragment about patriarchs is the longest of the four paragraphs: a total of fifteen verses pertains to them, including as many as twelve about Abraham. For comparison—in the following passage only six verses were devoted to Moses. Furthermore, those mentioned from Abraham to Joseph constitute four generations one after another, whereas those characterised in the remaining fragments do not belong to a single family. What makes this fragment distinct is the presence of terms meaning desires, which motivate actions mentioned as models of faith.



### 3. Desires of Patriarchs

The first reference to desires can be found already in the passage about Enoch (11:6), when there is a mention of God's reward for those who seek Him. In this text, the verb "to seek" (ἐκζητεῖν) is used. Abraham's desires are clearly at the centre of the commentary to his leaving his family home. The patriarch's desire, expressed with the verb "to eagerly wait" (ἐκδέχεσθαι), is associated with faith, which provides a guarantee that he will not be disappointed, that is, that he will achieve a goal which he yet does not see (11:10).<sup>20</sup> This motif returns in the history of the patriarchs with the verb belonging to the same semantic field: "to seek after" (ἐπιζητεῖν) (11:14); "to long for" (ὀρέγεσθαι) (11:16).<sup>21</sup>

The *inclusio* created by the repetition of terms "to get out" (11:8), and "exodus" (11:22), is congruent with the dominating themes of the entire paragraph about patriarchs. The verb of movement, used twice in the opening verse of this paragraph, illustrates the significance of the very notion of leaving<sup>22</sup> for the characteristics of the beginning of Abraham's journey as an act of faith. The connection between the patriarch's faith and his exodus introduces a major reinterpretation of the Old Testament (Gen 12:1–8). For the first mention of his faith emerges only three chapters later, when there is information of him accepting God's promise of a future descendant as the heir to his wealth (Gen 15:6). The Epistle

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<sup>20</sup> Even though the same verb also refers to the attitude of Christ, in His case the expectation does not require faith. His internal stance is reflected in His position; he is sitting at the right hand of God, "eagerly waiting until his enemies will be put under his feet" (10:13; cf. 1:13). The difference between Christ and the patriarchs consists in the fact that he has already achieved his goal, and he is with God, whereas they are still on their way, and therefore, not seeing their goal yet, they must be driven by their faith.

<sup>21</sup> These terms correspond to the verb "to look toward" (ἀποβλέπειν). However, its meaning is opposite to desire, for it predominantly indicates Moses looking away from other objects (11:26), which enabled him to look forward to the retribution for the slights suffered in Egypt.

<sup>22</sup> One can see here the dependence of the text on the Septuagint version, which differs with regard to that from the Masoretic Text, which has the command: "Go forth from your land, your kindred, and from your father's house to a land that I will show you." The verb "to go" / (*h/k*) is rendered in the Septuagint with a term associated with the Israelites leaving Egypt: "Go out (ἐξελεθε) from your land . . ."

to the Hebrews anticipates references to faith in order to present the patriarch as a believer since the outset.<sup>23</sup> Shifting the emphasis onto the patriarch's faith, it associates it with the ignorance of the goal of the travel at the moment of setting out: "he went out, not knowing where he was going" (11:8). This addition, as compared with the Old Testament Text, is in line with a meaningful asymmetry inherent in the command of God, who more and in greater detail lists what the patriarch has to leave behind than tells him what he could expect in return.<sup>24</sup>

Another deed performed through faith is the specific kind of inhabiting the promised land (Heb 11:9). The predicate *παρώκησεν* can be rendered as: "he lived in as a sojourner." The prefix of the Greek verb, *παρα-*, indicates that even a longer stay among the inhabitants of Canaan did not result in the patriarch becoming one of them: he did not live together with them, but next to them. This alienation is not a mere sociological or psychological category (neither is it in the case of Christians in 1 Pet 1:17), but it stems from God's announcement of the future progeny, who were to receive that land. According to the narrative of the Old Testament, the land which he travelled to, and where he settled, does not

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<sup>23</sup> The patriarch's faith is recalled in relation to the call to imitate those who inherited God's promises (6:12). The justification of that call ties his faith with his acceptance of the announcement of his progeny to be multiplied, when he had proven himself ready to sacrifice his only son (6:13–14; cf. Gen 22:16–18), and hence it sees the actions from an even later period of his life as having been an expression of faith (so, too, in 11:17–19).

<sup>24</sup> On the one hand, God specifies what he must leave behind: "Go forth from your land, your kindred, and from your father's house" (Gen 12:1a). These three elements—the land, the kindred, and father's house—are interconnected: from the widest in its range and least personal, to the most personal in its meaning. The land is due to him as a property passed on and increased in his family, therefore by leaving his father's house, he loses it irretrievably. By breaking family ties, he deprives not only himself, but also his descendants, of specific, familiar goods, taken over by virtue of the law of inheritance. On the other hand, the promise of the other land remains vague: "Go out . . . to a land that I will show you" (LXX Gen 12:1). The Old Testament informs us of his reaction to that command: "And Abram went as the Lord spoke to him" (LXX Gen 12:4).

instantly become his property, but it is promised as a future gift to his progeny.<sup>25</sup>

The lack of permanent settlement as a sign of temporary and fragile nature of the life of Abraham and his most well-known descendants is further underscored by the mention of their living in tents (Heb 11:9). They wandered as nomads looking for pastures, therefore they lived in tents. In their case, however, having such a residence had a fuller sense. The biblical image of a tent has a metaphorical meaning: it presents life as fleeting.<sup>26</sup> The number of the noun “tents” (σκηνάι)—only here, in the Epistle to the Hebrews it is used in the plural—evokes the image of a shepherds’ camp moved along their wanderings. This image contrasts with the description of the goal of patriarchs’ pursuits provided in the following verse.

The object of the desires of Abraham and other patriarchs is expressed in the sentence: “For he was eagerly awaiting the city that has foundations, whose architect and maker is God” (Heb 11:10). The metaphor of foundations and of God as an architect indicates the value of the goal of patriarch’s pursuit. Its permanence is highlighted by the contrast with the earlier image of tents as mobile settlements, erected by the patriarchs during their travels. In the Old Testament narrative nothing is said of Abram’s desire to reach a city, or at least to have a permanent residence. Attributing him any such

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<sup>25</sup> It is only after his arrival in Canaan that God appears to him for the second time, in order to indicate the promised land: “To your seed I will give this land” (Gen 12:7; cf. 13:15–16). God proclaims to Abram that his descendants will stay in a foreign land (Gen 15:13). Intending to purchase a burying place for the deceased Sarah, Abraham introduces himself to the inhabitants of Canaan: “I am a sojourner and a settler with you” (Gen 23:4). A similar self-identification is featured in David’s prayer spoken on behalf of the people, who the king likens to their ancestors (1 Chr 29:15; cf. Ps 39:13 [= LXX 38:13]). By giving his firstborn son, begotten in the land of the Midianities, the name Gershom, Moses explains the choice of such a name by his own fate of an exile: “I am a sojourner in a strange land” (Ex 2:22; cf. Ex 18:3). Even after their arrival in Canaan, Israelites should always see themselves as newcomers, and therefore they should not sell the land bestowed upon them, as it belongs to the Lord (Lev 25:23).

<sup>26</sup> The tent metaphor has the same meaning in the prayer of Hezekiah (Isa 38:11–12), and in the argument of the author of the Second Epistle of Peter (2 Pet 1:14).

desires would not be congruent with the account of his attitude, making him different in a good way from the people attempting to build a city and a tower for themselves (Gen 11:1–9). The Epistle to the Hebrews attributes to Abraham what is only implied in the text of the Old Testament. As opposed to the activity of the builders of the Tower of Babel, his carrying out of God’s plan takes the form of pursuing a city designed and erected solely by God.<sup>27</sup>

The Epistle to the Hebrews insists that Abraham together with his progeny “are seeking after a homeland” (Heb 11:14). The noun “homeland” (πατρίς) placed emphatically in relation to the predicate (preceding in the Greek text)—can mean the place of origin (father’s house and the period of upbringing), of residence, or of a longer stay. Here it presents the object of their longing, commonly considered to be natural for every man.<sup>28</sup> Patriarchs’ pursuit demonstrates that they did not reach their goal after the wandering through the desert, it is corroborated by the statement of their actual aspirations:<sup>29</sup> “But now they long for a better, that is, a heavenly. Therefore, God is not ashamed of them, to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city” (Heb 11:16). It is not the wandering, but their desires to reach a more lasting and greater homeland that makes them role models for all believers. These desires are clearly referred to in the closing of the Epistle, which ends in a series of appeals to the addressees.

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. D.J. Estes, “Looking for Abraham’s City,” BS 147 (1990): 412–13.

<sup>28</sup> A testament to the longing for the family home can be found in the Homeric epic poem, whose protagonist not only confesses: “So true is it that naught is sweeter than a man’s own land and his parents, even though it be in a rich house that he dwells afar in a foreign land away from his parents” (*Od.* 9: 34–35, trans. by A.T. Murray, Ph.D. [Cambridge, MA 1919]), but values the gift of immortality offered to him less than the ability to return to his homeland. Philo of Alexandria and Josephus considered the attachment to one’s homeland to be inbred in all people (*Legat.* 277; *Ant.* 1: 317).

<sup>29</sup> The verb “to long for” (ὀρέγεσθαι), which defines their aspirations, reappears only in the Pastoral Epistles. It indicates a desire whose object may be valued in a contrasting manner: either positively—office of a bishop (1 Tim 3:1), or negatively—money (1 Tim 6:10).

#### 4. Role Model for Believers

Towards the end of the Epistle, the earthly existence of Christians is presented as a firm pursuit of a goal: “For we do not have here a lasting city, but we are seeking after the city which is to come” (13:14; cf. 12:22–24). Paronomasia, that is, a juxtaposition of similarly sounding words, underscores a certain contrast: on the one hand, Christians do not possess “here a lasting city” (ὧδε μένουσαν πόλιν), on the other—they are seeking that “which is to come” (μέλλουσαν). The difference pertains to the nature of the two realities presented as cities. The first remains here, i.e., it is limited to what can be closed in space and frozen in time. The other is described by a participle of the verb μέλλειν, which depending on the words it is used about, may signify various aspects of salvation. Earlier in the Epistle there are already numerous references to the multilayered reality which is to constitute the object of Christian desires.<sup>30</sup> They ought not to direct themselves towards any alternative realities among other objectives selected or set by people. The object of their desire is to be advancing closer to God and staying with Him (Heb 4:16; 7:19; 10:19.25). Their longing will be fulfilled in the revelation of Christ to them (9:28).

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The Old Testament and the Epistle to the Hebrews are congruent in that they connect faith with the desire to reach the goods provided by God. In that sense, we can observe a marked continuity between the two parts of the Christian Bible. However, in the connection of Abraham’s faith with his desire one can also notice some discontinuity, which would not be so striking, if the object of his desired was identified as having a heir in a descendant. The Old Testament mentions the patriarch’s faith only in relation to the latter desires. Meanwhile, the Epistle to the Hebrews recognises them also at an earlier period. It does so not only to present the entire life of

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<sup>30</sup> At the very beginning of the Epistle, Christians are referred to as “those who are going to receive salvation” (1:14). Later, it is to them and not to the angels that the following are subjected to: “the world to come” (2:5), “the age to come” (6:5), and “the good things to come” (10:1).

the patriarch as an expression of faith, but also to underscore its significance for maintaining the desires of possessing the most important good, at the time unavailable for him and his descendants. The indication of a temporary residence (expressed in the image of the tents) defines the patriarchs' wanderings as incomplete, while their earthly as merely provisional. The object of these desires would only be what was given to Christians as the ultimate goal of their pursuit: abiding with God, the access to whom has been opened by Christ through His salvific work. Against the backdrop of this exemplary attitude of the patriarchs, expressed in striving towards such a goal—referred to as the city designed and erected by God—the radical novelty of the situation of Christians comes to the fore. If the pursuits of the latter are directed at what for them is already real and accessible, they should all the more foster the desires that governed the life of the former—persistent in their striving towards a goal which was for them at the time only promised and inaccessible.