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Hebrews 12.5–13, the Wilderness Period, and Israel's Discipline*

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Since the author of Hebrews locates his readers in Israel's wilderness period in Heb 3.1–4.11 and 11.8–39, the discussion of παιδεία in 12.5–13 should be interpreted in light of early Jewish conceptions of Israel's time in the wilderness. Confirmation that this is the correct context in which to understand 12.5–13 will be found in Deuteronomy, Wisdom, Philo, and Josephus, all of whom, like Hebrews, consider endurance of the disciplinary period of the wilderness necessary in order to inherit the promised rest. For this reason, Hebrews warns of Esau, the paradigmatic example of the undisciplined person who forfeits his inheritance.

Keywords: discipline, Deuteronomy, Esau, Hebrews, wilderness

In the only monograph-length study of Hebrews 12 currently published, N. C. Croy has argued that, while it 'is admittedly *not* among the most celebrated passages of the epistle..., one should not think that this passage is inconsequential, a sort of epistolary backwater'; on the contrary, it 'seems to express supremely the letter's paraenetic aim'.[1] In contrast to Heb 12.1–4, which has drawn considerable scholarly attention, no doubt due to its christological import,[2] one is hard

* I am grateful to Richard B. Hays and David M. Moffitt for their insightful comments on an earlier version of this paper.

1 N. C. Croy, *Endurance in Suffering: Hebrews 12:1–13 in its Rhetorical, Religious, and Philosophical Context* (SNTSMS 98; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1998) 5 (emphasis original). In addition, see the unpublished work of S. P. Logan, 'The Background of Paideia in Hebrews' (Ph.D. diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986).

2 Cf., for instance, P. Andriessen, 'Renonçant à la joie qui lui revenait...' *La nouvelle revue théologique* 97 (1975) 424–38; P.-E. Bonnard, 'La traduction de Hébreux 12,2: "C'est en vue de la joie que Jésus endura la croix"', *La nouvelle revue théologique* 97 (1975) 415–23; N. C. Croy, 'A Note on Hebrews 12:2', *JBL* 114 (1995) 117–19; P. Ellingworth, 'New Testament Text and Old Testament Context in Heb. 12.3', *Studia Biblica 1978 III: Papers on Paul and Other NT Authors* (ed. E. A. Livingstone; JSNTSS 3; Sheffield: JSOT, 1980) 89–95; E. Schüssler Fiorenza, 'Der Anführer und Vollender unseres Glaubens: Zum theologischen Verständnis des Hebräerbriefes', *Gestalt und Anspruch des Neuen Testaments* (ed. J. Schreiner; Würzburg: Echter, 1969) 262–81; J. J. Scott, 'Archegos in the Salvation History

pressed to find much discussion of 12.5–13.[3] The purpose of this paper is to begin to fill in this scholarly lacuna by contextualizing the rather mundane paraenesis of this passage within the underlying narrative of the letter to the Hebrews. It will be argued that the quotation from Prov 3.11–12 and subsequent discussion of παιδεία in 12.5–13 should be understood as an allusion to the παιδεία that Israel experienced in the wilderness period. By connecting the current situation of his readers to the discipline endured by Israel in the wilderness, the author is able to encourage his readers to locate themselves at a momentous time in Israel's history—a time in which entry into God's promised rest is imminent.[4]

1. The Narrative World Underlying the Letter to the Hebrews

As I have argued elsewhere, the author of Hebrews rewrites the history of God's people as an extended wilderness period.[5] Through his use of Psalm 95, a psalm in which David claims that even in his own day Israel had not entered into God's promised rest, the author concludes that Joshua failed to give the people rest (Heb 3.7–4.11).[6] Such a claim not only contradicts Josh 21.43–45, which states that YHWH gave Israel rest (καταπαύω) on every side, but also differs

of the Epistle to the Hebrews', *JETS* 29 (1986) 47–54; T. Söding, 'Zuversicht und Geduld im Schauen auf Jesus: Zum Glaubensbegriff des Hebräersbriefes', *ZNW* 82 (1991) 214–41; and W. Trilling, '"Jesus der Urbeher und Vollender des Glaubens" (Hebr XII,2)', *Das Evangelium auf dem Weg zum Menschen: zur Vermittlung und zum Vollzug des Glaubens* (ed. O. Knoch ; Frankfurt: Knecht, 1973) 3–23.

3 Apart from Croy's monograph, this author has found only two articles that deal with Heb 12.5–13: G. Bornkamm, 'Sohnschaft und Leiden: Hebräer 12,5–11', *Geschichte und Glaube 2. Gesammelte Aufsätze 4* (GET 53; Munich: Chr. Kaiser, 1971) 214–24, and T. Mende, '"Wen der Herr liebhat, den züchtigt er" (Hebr 12, 6): Der alttestamentliche Hintergrund von Hebr 12,1–11; 1,1–4; 2,6–10', *TTZ* 100 (1991) 23–38.

4 In this way, the author is at work not merely in reporting on the world but also in producing a world which his readers are to inhabit, as has been suggested by L. T. Johnson, 'The Scriptural World of Hebrews', *Int* 57.3 (2003) 237–50 (238).

5 See M. Thiessen, 'Hebrews and the End of the Exodus', *NovT* 49.4 (2007) 353–69, for detailed argumentation. In this article I have tried to follow the counsel of Johnson, 'Scriptural World', 238: 'If our question is how Hebrews imagines a certain kind of world, then we must allow our imaginations to be engaged, not by this or that part of the text, but by the composition as a whole'.

6 On Hebrews' use of Psalm 95, see P. E. Enns, 'The Interpretation of Psalm 95 in Hebrews 3.1–4.13', *Early Christian Interpretation of the Scriptures of Israel: Investigations and Proposals* (ed. C. A. Evans and J. A. Sanders; JSNTSS 148; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997) 352–63, and D. Flusser, '"Today if You will Listen to His Voice": Creative Jewish Exegesis in Hebrews 3–4', *Creative Biblical Exegesis: Christian and Jewish Hermeneutics through the Centuries* (ed. B. Uffenheimer and H. G. Reventlow; JSOTSup 59; Sheffield: JSOT, 1988) 55–62.

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sharply from the biblical narrative in which God's people settle the land, establish monarchs, and build the Temple. For Hebrews, although Joshua brought the Israelites into the land, the people's existence upon it was not characterized as a permanent rest. Rather, their existence was that of a sojourner, much like Abraham's time in the land (11.9–10)—a tenuous existence marked by struggle.[7] As a result of this apparent historical revisionism, in the summary of Israel's history found in ch. 11,[8] the author of Hebrews finds it necessary to omit elements of Israel's past which assume Israel's possession of the land.[9] In summarizing Israel's history, the author claims that they had not received what had been promised to them, and would only do so together with the readers of Hebrews: 'And all these being well-attested by faith did not receive the promise, since God foresaw something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us' (11.39–40).[10]

These verses encapsulate the author's re-narration of Israel's history—a narration in which the author has placed both himself and his readers in the wilderness period together with all the generations of God's people who have been awaiting entry into God's promised rest. The paraenetic payoff of this narrative for the author is that, by situating his readers in this period, he is able to provide a compelling reason why they are currently enduring hardship and suffering.[11] At the same time, the author places his readers at the very cusp of entrance into God's promised rest in order to demonstrate the temporal nature of the hardship his readers endure.[12]

7 Cf. K. Backhaus, 'Das Land der Verheißung: Die Heimat der Glaubenden im Hebräerbrief', *NTS* 47 (2001) 171–88 (174), who argues that the 'Wanderexistenz und die *bleibende* Fremdheit' of Abraham and the forefathers characterizes the existence of the people of the promise (emphasis original).

8 Although M. Cosby, *The Rhetorical Composition and Function of Hebrews 11: In Light of Example Lists in Antiquity* (Macon: Mercer University, 1988), argues that Hebrews 11 belongs to the Greco-Roman genre of an 'Example List', H. Thyen, *Der Stil der Jüdisch-Hellenistischen Homilie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1955), is correct in arguing that the chapter is best understood as a retelling of Israel's history. C. Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux* (Sources Bibliques; 2 vols.; Paris: Gabalda, 1952–53), arguing for a mediating position, claims that Hebrews 11 is a combination of rewritten history and an example list.

9 This connection between Hebrews 3–4 and Hebrews 11 has been noted by W. G. Johnsson, 'The Pilgrimage Motif in the Book of Hebrews', *JBL* 97 (1978) 239–51 (241), who argues that 'ideas implied and inchoate in 3:6b–4:11 reach explicit expression in chap. 11'.

10 All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

11 So too, K. L. Schenck, *Cosmology and Eschatology in Hebrews: The Settings of the Sacrifice* (SNTSMS 143; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2007) 15–16, although Schenck offers a considerably different account of the narrative underlying the letter.

12 Cf. Thiessen, 'Hebrews and the End of the Exodus', 369, and D. M. Allen, *Deuteronomy and Exhortation in Hebrews: A Study in Narrative Re-presentation* (WUNT 2/238; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 68.

2. The Wilderness Period as Discipline in Jewish Tradition

Given this narrative framework of the letter, the quotation of Prov 3.11–12 and the following discussion on the nature of God's discipline in Heb 12.5–13 should be understood in relation to Jewish conceptions of Israel's period of wandering as a time of παιδεία.[13]

As early as Deut 8.5, a verse that parallels Prov 3.11–12, the wilderness period was viewed as the disciplinary action of God.[14] As part of his speech to the people of Israel at the end of the forty-year period of wandering, Moses reminds the Israelites of their exodus from Egypt and their time in the wilderness: 'Know in your heart that, as a man disciplines his son, YHWH your God disciplines you' (Deut 8.5). Deuteronomy views the events of the exodus and wilderness wandering as a disciplinary period, meant to train the people in obedience to the law (cf. 11.2). Significantly, for the comprehension of our passage, the LXX translation of Deuteronomy states that God disciplines (παιδεύω) Israel like a father disciplines (παιδεύω) his son (8.5) and links this to the testing in the wilderness (8.2–4): 'And you will remember all the ways which the Lord your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or not…' Already in the book of Deuteronomy we see a tradition that emphasizes the instructional nature of the wilderness period, not the punitive aspect of that time period.[15] This tradition is extended in the LXX translation of Deuteronomy

13 Although perceptions of the wilderness were highly variegated in both the OT and non-biblical Jewish literature, this article is restricted to the disciplinary perception. For studies on the diverse traditions surrounding the wilderness, see, for instance, R. L. Cohn, *The Shape of Sacred Space* (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1981) 7–23; R. B. Leal, *Wilderness in the Bible: Toward a Theology of Wilderness* (Studies in Biblical Literature 72; New York: Peter Lang, 2004); L. Wall, 'Finding Identity in the Wilderness', *Wilderness: Essays in Honour of Frances Young* (ed. R. S. Sugirtharajah; LNTS 295; London: T&T Clark, 2005) 66–77; and, most recently, H. Najman, 'Towards a Study of the Uses of the Concept of Wilderness in Ancient Judaism', *DSD* 13.1 (2006) 99–113.

14 M. V. Fox, *Proverbs 1–9: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 18A; New York: Doubleday, 2000) 152–3, argues that, in view of the parallels with Job 5.17 and Deut 8.5, Prov 3.12 was likely a common maxim. W. L. Lane, *Hebrews* (2 vols.; WBC 47; Dallas: Word, 1991) 2.420, notes the similar language between the two passages but does not discuss the possible significance of Deut 8.5 for Hebrews 12.

15 As Croy, *Endurance in Suffering*, 88–89, and D. A. deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Epistle 'to the Hebrews'* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000) 448–9, have pointed out, Prov 3.11–12 clearly envisions punitive discipline. The possible influence of Deuteronomy 8 on Hebrews' understanding of Prov 3.11–12 may explain how the author of Hebrews could understand παιδεία not as punitive but as instructional, an observation also made by Allen, *Deuteronomy and Exhortation*, 80. On the distinction between educative and punitive discipline, see Croy, *Endurance in Suffering*, and J. A. Sanders, *Suffering as Divine Discipline in the Old Testament and Post-Biblical Judaism* (Rochester: Colgate Rochester Divinity School, 1955).

itself. The recital of Israel's history found in the Song of Moses again discusses Israel's time in the wilderness. Although not connected explicitly to Israel's exodus, as in Deuteronomy 8, Deut 32.10 says that God taught or cared for (בין) Israel in a wild land. The possible ambiguity of the Hebrew word בין is clarified by the LXX rendering παιδεύω.[16] Further, like Deuteronomy 8, the Song of Moses portrays this disciplining God as a father and Israel as his children (cf. 32.5–6).[17] In his study on wilderness traditions in the Bible, R. B. Leal says of Deuteronomy: '[W]ilderness is not just an incidental and almost fortuitous interlude between slavery in Egypt and conquest of the Promised Land. It becomes part of a pre-ordained plan for the constitution of a people worthy of Yahweh'.[18] Thus, Deuteronomy portrays the wilderness period as a necessary time of discipline, a time in which God's people are prepared for entry into the land of promise. That the tradition of viewing the wilderness period as a time of discipline would be picked up by Hebrews is not surprising given both the influence that the book of Deuteronomy has had on the letter[19] and the fact that just such a tradition was deployed in a number of later Jewish writings, demonstrating that it continued to be a popular perception of the wilderness period.

The Wisdom of Solomon, a first-century BCE or early first-century CE work of Egyptian provenance,[20] is heavily indebted to exodus traditions, as P. Enns has demonstrated.[21] The dependence upon such traditions extends also to the

16 According to *KB*, the *polel* of בין means 'to take care of', while the *hiphil* means 'to teach'. Since the *polel* of בין is rare, it is understandable that the LXX has rendered the word as παιδεύω. Similarly, the *targumim* and *Sifre Deuteronomy* 320 also interpret the *polel* of בין as instruction, although both specifically relate it to instruction in Torah.

17 See also the parental imagery of the eagle watching over its young in Deut 32.11. As P. C. B. Andriessen, 'La Teneur Judéo-chrétienne de He I 6 et II 14B-III.2', *NovT* 18.4 (1976) 293–313 (298), states, 'L'idée de l'adoption divine est particulièrement chère au rédacteur du Dt'.

18 Leal, *Wilderness in the Bible*, 137. So too, Cohn, *Shape of Sacred Space*, 15, who states that for Deuteronomy 'the forty years in the wilderness was a necessary stage in the molding of the people'.

19 Cf. Allen, *Deuteronomy and Exhortation*, and G. J. Steyn, 'Deuteronomy in Hebrews', *Deuteronomy in the New Testament* (ed. M. J. J. Menken and S. Moyise; LNTS 358; London: T&T Clark, 2007) 152–68.

20 C. Larcher, *Le Livre de la Sagesse ou la Sagesse de Salomon* (3 vols.; Etudes Bibliques 1; Paris: Gabalda, 1983–85) 1.141–61, argues that Wisdom was written after the Roman conquest of Egypt in 47 BCE, while D. Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon* (AB 43; Garden City: Doubleday, 1979) 20–5, has argued that it was written at the time of Caligula (37–41 CE). Although D. Georgi, *Weisheit Salomos* (JSHRZ 3.4; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1980) 394–7, has argued that Wisdom was written in Syria during the second century BCE, his position has garnered little support.

21 P. Enns, *Exodus Retold: Ancient Exegesis of the Departure from Egypt in Wis 10:15–21 and 19:1–9* (HSM 57; Atlanta: Scholars, 1987). See also B. J. L. Peerbolte, 'The Hermeneutics of Exodus in the Book of Wisdom', *The Interpretation of Exodus: Studies in Honour of Cornelius Houtman* (ed. R. Roukema; CBET 44; Leuven: Peeters, 2006) 97–116.

subsequent wilderness period, as seen in Wisdom's discussion of the events at the waters of Marah:[22]

> For when they [the wilderness generation] were tried (πειράζω), though they were being disciplined (παιδεύω) in mercy, they learned how the ungodly were tormented when judged in wrath. For you tested (δοκιμάζω) them as a father does in warning (νουθετέω), but you examined the ungodly as a stern king does in condemnation (Wis 11.9–10).

Both the punitive and instructional aspects of παιδεία are evident in this text, though the author attributes the punitive aspect to God's dealings with the nations and the instructional aspect to God's dealings with his own people.[23] The author is not concerned with the exegesis and clarification of this account, but rather with utilizing the 'motifs and themes from Exodus to illustrate and clarify the position of his readers'.[24] As Peerbolte concludes, '[T]he Exodus story becomes a hermeneutical framework for understanding the conditions in Alexandria…'[25] Again, we see a connection between God's discipline of his people in the wilderness and the familial relationship this discipline evinces: with Israel God acts as a father, with Egypt he acts as a stern king.

Philo, another Alexandrian Jew, also seems aware of and employs a tradition in which the wilderness period is seen as a time of testing and training. In *Life of Moses* 1.199, he claims that the manna that God provided was meant to teach (παιδεύω) Israel not to bear up grudgingly, but to persevere (ὑπομένω). This passage is unique in that it is God's *good provision* that is meant to discipline them.[26] Nonetheless, we see the more standard view in a detailed discussion of παιδεία in *Preliminary Studies* 163–77, a passage in which Philo uses the wilderness period to serve as an allegory for life, linking the event at Marah (Exod 15), Deuteronomy 8, Prov 3.11–12, and the figure of Esau. For Philo, the wilderness period represents life, the tests (such as at the waters of Marah) represent

22 Cf. Exodus 15. For other biblical passages that refer to this event and call the behaviour of the people into question, see Num 20.2–11; Deut 6.16; 9.22; LXX Pss 94.8–9; 105.32.

23 As S. Cheon, *The Exodus Story in the Wisdom of Solomon: A Study in Biblical Interpretation* (JSPSS 23; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997) 32, notes, Wisdom ignores or reinterprets the clear statements of Exodus regarding the guilt of the people in complaining against God.

24 Peerbolte, 'The Hermeneutics of Exodus', 100.

25 Peerbolte, 'The Hermeneutics of Exodus', 100, who reads Wisdom against the backdrop of Egyptian idolatry and not overt persecution. In contrast, Cheon, *Exodus Story*, 125–49, believes the historical events behind what the author views as God's discipline is the Alexandrian pogrom of 38 CE. Peerbolte's reading has the benefit of linking the use of exodus traditions with Wisdom's strong polemic against idolatry, while Cheon's reading makes good sense of the emphasis on discipline by placing it within the context of Jewish suffering in Alexandria.

26 Although even within the context of Deut 8.5 mention is made of the food and clothing God provided for the people while in the wilderness (8.3–4).

παιδεία, and Egypt represents passion (πάθος). In reference to the statement of Exod 15.25, that at Marah God tested (πειράζω) them, Philo claims that in testing (δοκιμασία) lies much toil and bitterness, which cause some to lose heart and, like weary athletes (ἀθληταί), to drop their hands in weakness (χεῖρες ὑπ' ἀσθενείας), determining to return to Egypt to indulge passion (*Prelim. Studies* 165). In contrast, others face the dangers of the wilderness (ἔρημος) with patience and persevere in the contest of life (τόν ἀγῶνα τοῦ βίου διήθλησαν, 165). In light of the value of testing, Philo admonishes his readers not to turn away (ἀποστρέφω) from afflictions such as these, 'for the admonished soul (νουθετουμένη ψυχή) is fed by the disciplines (παιδεία) of doctrine' (167).[27] Accordingly, Philo reminds his readers of the words of Moses to the people of Israel after the period in the wilderness by quoting Deut 8.2: 'Remember every way which the Lord your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you (ἐκπειράζω) and discerning (διαγινώσκω) what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments, or not'. For Philo, Deut 8.2–3 creates a theological problem because the text states that God did evil (ἐκάκωσεν) to Israel. Thus, he says that these things must be understood allegorically; by κακόω one should understand that God disciplined (παιδεύω), admonished (νουθετέω), and chastened (σωφρονίζω) them (172). This demonstrates clearly that affliction is a good thing—something that people without wisdom do not realize. In fact, discipline is such a blessing that its most humiliating form, slavery, is considered of value, something that Philo demonstrates by referring to Isaac's 'blessing' in which Esau is condemned in slavery to Jacob (175–6; cf. Gen 27.40). According to Philo, it was for this reason that Solomon said: 'My son, do not disregard the discipline (παιδεία) of God, nor lose courage when you are reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives' (*Prelim. Studies* 177; cf. Prov 3.11–12). Philo concludes that discipline draws one close to God because there is no relationship closer than that of a father to a son.

Thus, Philo's discussion of παιδεία in *Preliminary Studies* demonstrates that the close verbal similarities between Deut 8.5 and Prov 3.11–12 were not lost on Jews writing around the time of the author of Hebrews.[28] Further, it shows that Philo believed that the wilderness period represented the trials of life, something that could be compared to an athletic contest.[29] Finally, this examination of

27 All translations from Philo are taken from F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, *Philo* (10 vols.; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1929–62).

28 While Deut 8.5 and Prov 3.11–12 are not explicitly linked in any other extant Jewish literature from the Second Temple Period, they are linked in later rabbinical literature. Cf. *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael, Bahodesh* 10 and *Sifre Deuteronomy* 32.

29 Croy, *Endurance in Suffering*, 113. This accords with Philo's argument that the Law was given in the desert because God needed first to purify Israel (*Decalogue* 10–13). On the basis of this, U. W. Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness: The Wilderness Theme in the Second Gospel and its*

Preliminary Studies shows that Philo viewed παιδεία as a demonstration of the close bond between God and his people—a bond that can only be compared to the relationship between father and son.

These traditions regarding Israel's wilderness period are not limited to Alexandrian Judaism, as Josephus's treatment of the wilderness period in *Jewish Antiquities* demonstrates. In fact, we see the same mixture of athletic imagery, wilderness period, and discussion of trials and discipline in Josephus's retelling of the biblical narratives as we found in Philo's account in *Preliminary Studies*. In response to the people's complaint in the desert, Moses states that God was testing them (δοκιμάζω) to see what strength and memory of God's past deeds the people possessed (*Ant.* 3.15). Thus the events at Marah served as an exercise for the people (γυμνάζω) that they failed to persevere in (ὑπομονή), and for which they were reproved (ἐλέγχω). Additionally, Josephus connects God's punishment of Israel in the wilderness with his paternal relationship to them: 'Moses, emboldened, now approached the people and announced that God, moved by their insolence, would exact retribution, not indeed proportionate to their errors, but such as fathers inflict upon their children for their admonition' (*Ant.* 3.311).[30] For Josephus, the discipline that Israel endured under the leadership of Moses is an integral part of the identity of his contemporary Ἰουδαῖοι for, at the beginning of *Antiquities*, he states that he intended to make clear who the Jews were—that is, what fortune they had endured, what lawgiver disciplined (παιδεύω) them in piety (*Ant.* 1.6).

The literary evidence from Deuteronomy, Wisdom of Solomon, Philo, and Josephus indicates that there was an established tradition within early Judaism of interpreting the wilderness wanderings as a period of educative discipline (sometimes described using athletic imagery) in which God's people were prepared for entry into the land of promise, and that this discipline demonstrated the legitimate familial ties between the people and God their father.[31]

Basis in the Biblical Tradition (SBT 39; Naperville: Allenson, 1963) 54, argues that Philo sees the wilderness 'as a training field on which skills are developed which are necessary for the establishment and administration of a sound national life'.

30 All quotations from Josephus are taken from H. St. J. Thackeray et al., eds., *Josephus* (10 vols.; LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1926–65).

31 A similar view of the wilderness as a place of testing and training is found in the later rabbinic commentary on Exodus, *Mekhilta de Rabbi-Ishmael*. Cf. *Mekhilta, Beshallah* 1: '"of the wilderness", indicates that it was for the purpose of refining them, as it is said: "Who led thee through the great and dreadful wilderness", etc. (Deut. 8.15); "by the Red Sea", indicates that it was for the purpose of testing them, as it is said: "And they were rebellious at the sea, even at the Red Sea" (Ps. 106.7)…', and *Mekhilta, Vayassa'* 1: 'Hence what must be the meaning of "And there He proved them"? There God tested Israel'. Quotations are taken from J. Z. Lauterbach, *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael* (3 vols.; Philadelphia: JPS, 1933) 1.174 and 2.94.

3. Hebrews 12.5–13 and God's Wilderness Discipline

Through the use of Prov 3.11–12, the author of Hebrews indicates to his readers that the difficulties and trials they are encountering do not mean that God has been unfaithful to them; instead, these difficulties are God's παιδεία, and thus evidence that they are God's children: 'My son, do not disregard the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives' (Heb 12.5–6; cf. Prov 3.11–12).[32] Yet, in light of the interpretive tradition observed above and the broader narrative framework previously established by the author of Hebrews, the citation of Prov 3.11–12 and the subsequent discussion of παιδεία (Heb 12.5–13) should be understood as referring to the readers' current situation in the wilderness, despite the fact that neither the wilderness wanderings nor Deuteronomy 8 are specifically mentioned.[33] Corroboration for this interpretation of Hebrews' discussion of God disciplining the readers as a father does his children can be found by comparing Heb 12.5–13 to the wilderness traditions of Deut 8, Wisdom, Philo, and Josephus.[34]

The athletic imagery in Philo's discussion of God's discipline in the wilderness period finds correspondences not only in Josephus's account of the wilderness generation but also in Hebrews 12. Philo's portrayal of the παιδεία in the wilderness as an allegory for the contest of life (ὁ ἀγὼν τοῦ βίου, *Prelim. Studies* 165) is similar to that of Heb 12.1–2, where the author, in the context of Israel's continuing exodus, exhorts his readers to run the race (ἀγών) set before them with perseverance. As Johnson states: 'The image of the race is drawn from the Greek culture of competitive games. But because of this marvelous intertwining of

32 On the issues surrounding this scriptural quotation, see P. Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 648.

33 Presumably the author uses Prov 3.11–12 and not Deut 8.5 since the Proverbs citation can be used as a direct exhortation to his readers, and thus the author can ask: 'Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?' Cf. Bornkamm, 'Sohnschaft', 223, who states that the author uses the citation 'als Gottes eigenes Wort an den Frommen', and L. T. Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (NTL; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006) 320, who says that 'the author contemporizes the passage: it does not simply speak to ancient students of the sages. It speaks for God, who now addresses the author and his hearers as "sons" '. This is part of a larger trend throughout the letter, as noted by Johnson, 'Scriptural World', 240–1. The only commentators who have detected the influence of Deut 8.5 on Hebrews 12 are Spicq, *L'Épître aux Hébreux*, 2.391, and Allen, *Deuteronomy and Exhortation*, 79–82.

34 This accords with Johnson, 'Scriptural World', 239, who argues that 'the composition reveals an extraordinarily comprehensive and thorough reader of the Greek translation of Torah known as the Septuagint (LXX). The author's liberal use of citation and allusion suggests a confidence that the composition's readers share some degree of that competence'.

textual allusion, the hearers know that this race is one of pilgrimage begun by Abraham as he looked for a lasting city (Heb 11:13–16)'.[35] Further, just as Josephus claims that God exercised (γυμνάζω) and reproved (ἐλέγχω) the first wilderness generation (*Ant.* 3.15–16), so too, the readers of Hebrews are being exercised (γυμνάζω, Heb 12.11) and reproved (ἐλέγχω, Heb 12.5), although in contrast to the wilderness generation who failed in endurance (ὑπομονή, *Ant.* 3.15), the author exhorts his readers to run the race with perseverance (ὑπομονή, Heb 12.1). In view of the author's concern to portray Israel's wilderness wandering as a present reality for his readers, it seems that this mixture of athletic imagery with a discussion of παιδεία is meant to evoke Jewish traditions that portrayed the wilderness period as an athletic contest in which God disciplined his children in preparation for their entrance into the land.[36] The placement of the present generation in the wilderness within the textual world of the letter to the Hebrews finds a contemporary, physical parallel in the Qumran Community.[37] By reminding his readers that God disciplines his children and by linking it with athletic imagery, the author further intimates that they are in the wilderness period and must submit to God's discipline if they want to live (12.9), for unless the readers of Hebrews go through the wilderness discipline, they are illegitimate children who, like Esau, forgo their inheritance.[38]

35 Johnson, 'Scriptural World', 241.

36 Although he does not see the connection between Deuteronomy's account of the wilderness generation as a period of discipline where the people of God were trained for entrance into the land of promise, deSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude*, 445, understands the discipline of Hebrews 12 as training for the kingdom.

37 See, for instance, *1QS* 8.13–16, where the community will separate itself from the wicked by entering the מדבר; and *1QM* 1.2, where the community members (the sons of Judah, Levi, and Benjamin) are referred to as those exiled to the wilderness (גולת המדבד). S. Talmon, 'The "Desert Motif" in the Bible and in Qumran Literature', *Biblical Motifs: Origins and Transformations* (ed. A. Altmann; Studies and Texts III; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1966) 31–63 (63), rightly states: 'Ultimately the "desert" became the locale of a period of purification and preparation for the achievement of a new goal. This goal is the conquest of the Holy Land…' Cf. also M. Bernstein, '4Q159 fragment 5 and the "Desert Theology" of the Qumran Sect', *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov* (ed. S. M. Paul; Leiden: Brill, 2003) 43–56, and A. Schofield, 'The Wilderness Motif in the Dead Sea Scrolls', *Israel in the Wilderness: Interpretations of the Biblical Narratives in Jewish and Christian Traditions* (ed. K. E. Pomykala; TBN 10; Leiden: Brill, 2008) 37–53. Similarly, the wilderness as a period of testing and preparation can be found in NT literature outside of Hebrews, in particular, Jesus' temptation, for which see W. R. Stegner, 'Wilderness and Testing in the Scrolls and in Matthew 4:1–11', *BR* 12 (1967) 18–27, and Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness*, 62–149.

38 Lane, *Hebrews*, 2.424, suggests that καὶ ζήσομεν (12.9) evokes the covenant blessings of Deut 30.11–20, where obedience leads to life in the land. This allusion would again strengthen the author's effort to demonstrate that his readers are in the wilderness period.

4. Esau as Despiser of the Inheritance

Having attempted to encourage his readers by situating them at the very end of the wilderness period, along with all previous generations of God's people,[39] the author employs stock imagery of discouragement (αἱ παρειμέναι χεῖρες καὶ τὰ παραλελυμένα γόνατα) and calls the people to renew their strength (12.12–13).[40] The readers are called to strive for peace and to guard against any root of bitterness that might defile them (12.14–15). This reference to a root of bitterness (ῥίζα πικρίας), an allusion to Deut 29.18, again places the people in the wilderness about to enter into the land of promise and serves to warn them of lurking danger.[41]

Why does the author appeal to the negative example of Esau after situating his readers in the wilderness period? It is possible, as attested throughout Philo's writings, that Esau functioned in Jewish tradition as a paradigmatic example of an undisciplined person, a character flaw that was well known to both the author and readers. For instance, in *Alleg. Interp.* 3.2, Esau allegorically stands for the life of the undisciplined (ἀπαιδευσία). In *Prelim. Studies* 61 his name is interpreted as 'an oak because he is unbending, unyielding, disobedient, and stiff-necked by nature, with folly as his counselor'.[42] In *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, Philo repeatedly portrays Esau as given to vice and lust. In *QG* 4.165, he has a mind

39 Apparently the author does not think that death has ended the wilderness period for previous generations, since he states that those who had gone before would not be perfected apart from the recipients of the letter (Heb 11.40). Johnson, *Hebrews*, 316, rightly states of the great cloud of witnesses: '[T]hese witnesses themselves need the present generation to complete the race if they are themselves to be perfected'.

40 Cf. Jer 6.24; Ecclus 2.12; 25.23. If Ellingworth, *Epistle to the Hebrews*, 657, is correct that the author is alluding to Isa 35.3 (ἰσχύσατε, χεῖρες ἀνειμέναι καὶ γόνατα παραλελυμένα), then exodus imagery is again evoked (cf. Isa 35.1, 6). As noted above, in discussing the events at Marah, Philo states, 'many people are very quickly fatigued and fall, thinking labour a terrible adversary, and they let their hands fall out of weakness (αἱ χεῖρες ὑπ' ἀσθενείας), like tired athletes, determining to return to Egypt to the indulgence of their passions' (*Prelim. Studies* 164). Thus, like Heb 12.12, Philo also places drooping hands in the context of the exodus where they signify the danger of falling back from entry into the land of promise.

41 For the textual issue surrounding this verse and LXX Deut 29.18, see C. R. Koester, *Hebrews: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 36; New York: Doubleday, 2001) 531–2, and H. W. Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989) 366–8.

42 While *Preliminary Studies* does not refer to Esau's indiscipline in discussing Gen 27.40, as noted above, Philo does refer to Esau's disciplining by his father by being made a slave to Isaac (*Prelim. Studies* 175–6). Adding up all the parallels between Hebrews 12 and Philo's *Preliminary Studies*, we see that both have a discussion of παιδεία in the context of the wilderness, deploy the imagery of an athletic contest, refer to drooping hands, and mention Esau as a negative example. This striking collocation of motifs in both *Preliminary Studies* and Hebrews raises the question of the possible dependence of the author of Hebrews on Philo,

> wild and untamed and intractable and ferocious and bestial; and some (are like) dogs because they indulge immoderate impulses and in all things act madly and furiously. In addition to this, being a man of the fields, he is without a city and a fugitive from the laws, unknowing of right behaviour and unbridled and refractory and not having anything in common with righteous and good men.[43]

In words which parallel Heb 12.16, Philo states: 'For it was not for the sake of a trifling cooked pottage that [Esau] gave up his rights as first-born and yielded to the younger [brother] but because he made himself a slave to the pleasures of the belly. Let him be reproved and condemned as one who never was zealous for restraint and continence' (*QG* 4.168). Esau is 'the perfectly untamed and undisciplined man' (*QG* 4.231, 232), whose father is grieved by his indiscipline.

Hebrews has a similar understanding of Esau, although he functions not only as the primary example of one who rejects God's discipline but also as one in whom the horrific consequences of such unwillingness to be disciplined are made manifest. Esau sold his birthrights (πρωτοτόκια) for a single meal, and therefore no longer had any share in the inheritance.[44] Unlike the πρωτότοκος Jesus, who received the inheritance of a better name (Heb 1.4), Esau provides an example of someone who is denied his inheritance (12.17). In fact, the author argues that Esau found no opportunity to repent, despite his shedding of tears.[45] Likewise, if the readers of Hebrews do not endure God's discipline, they too might become immoral and forfeit their inheritance, which includes God's promised rest.

Although Jesus, the ἀρχηγός,[46] has now opened up a way for God's people to obtain the promised inheritance, the recipients of the letter still find themselves

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as has been argued by C. Spicq, 'L'Épître aux Hébreux et Philon: Un cas d'insertion de la literature sacrée dans la culture profane du 1er siècle (Hébr. V,11-VI,20 et le "De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini" de Philon)', *ANRW* 2.25.4 (1987) 3602–18, and has been argued against by R. Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (ALGHJ 4; Leiden: Brill, 1970).

43 Translations of *QG* taken from R. Marcus, *Philo: Supplement 1: Questions and Answers on Genesis* (LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1953) 450.

44 The plural is used in LXX Genesis 25, although the MT has the singular בכרתו ('his birthright'). The Israelites are the πρωτότοκα, who are delivered from the destroying angel in Egypt (Heb 11.28) and who are now in the heavenly Jerusalem (12.23). The identity of the πρωτότοκα in 12.23 has been a matter of dispute (for instance, by E. Käsemann, *The Wandering People of God: An Investigation of the Letter to the Hebrews* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984] 50, who argues that they are angels), though *4 Ezra* 6.58 and *Jub* 2.20 use a similar phrase to connote the people of God, and the previous reference in Heb 11.28 identifies the firstborn with Israel. Cf. Lane, *Hebrews*, 2.468–9; Attridge, *Epistle*, 375.

45 While rabbinic literature generally contains an equally negative view of Esau, it is striking that at least one text (*Gen. R.* 66.13), in contrast to Hebrews, claims that he did repent.

46 The import of this christological title is uncertain, as the monograph by P.-G. Müller, *ΧΡΙΣΤΟΣ ΑΡΧΗΓΟΣ: Der religionsgeschichtliche und theologische Hintergrund einer*

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outside this promised rest and in a period of παιδεία.[47] The author assures them that this is to be expected and is the proof that they belong to God's family, according to Prov 3.11–12.[48] In fact, this is exactly the pattern provided for them by the example of Jesus, who, although a son, learned obedience through what he suffered (Heb 5.8).[49] As a result, they are not to grow discouraged, nor are they to behave like Esau by impatiently selling their πρωτοτόκια.

5. Conclusion

In accord with the contention of this article, Allen has argued for the strong connection between Hebrews' readers and the original wilderness generation, but states: 'Despite the significant correspondence between the wilderness generation and Hebrews, the latter never explicitly says that its readers are *in* the wilderness or wandering aimlessly in it. The closest Hebrews comes to placing the readers specifically in the desert is 12.5–13, which equates the audience's suffering with [the] positive παιδεία of the wilderness era'.[50] Yet the narrative world in which the author has placed both himself and his readers in Heb 3.7–4.11 and 11.8–40 has been clearly defined as Israel's wilderness period; therefore, the author does not need to make *explicit* reference to the wilderness in 12.5–13 since the underlying narrative of the letter has already located the readers in this period. Additionally, as this examination of the wilderness traditions in Deuteronomy, Philo, Wisdom, and Josephus has demonstrated, numerous verbal clues exist within 12.5–13 which lead to the conclusion that the author is deploying certain Jewish beliefs which a knowledgeable reader would have recognized as evoking the period of Israel's wilderness wanderings.

Just as Deuteronomy, Philo, Wisdom, and Josephus understand the wilderness period as a time of discipline, so too, the author of Hebrews understands the wilderness as a period of discipline. In a manner similar to that of Philo, Hebrews

neutestamentlichen Christusprädikation (Peter Lang: Frankfurt, 1973), makes clear. Nonetheless, the fact that ἀρχηγοί figure prominently in OT wilderness traditions (cf. Num 13.2–3; 16.1–3; 25.1–5) suggests that Jesus should be understood as the ἀρχηγός who faithfully enters the promised rest, in contrast to the ἀρχηγοί of Moses' day who did not. Cf. Thiessen, 'Hebrews and the End of the Exodus', 366–7.

47 While Schenck, *Cosmology and Eschatology*, 23, is correct in asserting that 'Christ's death is arguably the focal event of Hebrews' narrative world', this does not take away from the fact that the paraenesis focuses on the less-than-triumphant experience of the readers.

48 As Lane, *Hebrews*, 2.421, states: 'there is a necessary and integral relationship between sufferings and a filial relationship with the Lord'.

49 On the close connection between Jesus' sonship and the sonship of the letter's recipients, see Bornkamm, 'Sohnschaft', and Johnson, *Hebrews*, 321.

50 Allen, *Deuteronomy and Exhortation*, 195 (emphasis original).

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interprets the wilderness period as the trials of life endured by God's people. By doing so, he is able to utilize this Jewish tradition about the wilderness period to encourage his readers. Although the preceding argument has demonstrated that Heb 12.5–13 has much in common with Jewish wilderness traditions, there are, to be sure, a number of differences. For Hebrews, the readers are to have a confidence rooted in the fact that this is the way that God has always dealt with his people—that suffering is a form of divine discipline. Even more encouraging for the readers is the reminder that Jesus has indeed passed through the wilderness period and entered into the joy set before him.[51] Johnson states of Heb 12.5–13:

> These verses are critical to understanding both the Christology of Hebrews and its vision of discipleship. Yet, because the metaphorical field within which they work is often missed, the following section can be regarded as the intrusion of an offensively banal bit of advice. We are, in fact, within the same metaphor as in 12:1–4, where the moral life was sketched in terms of participation in athletic games.[52]

Johnson's remarks about the seeming banality of the passage echo the statements made by Croy, noted in the introduction to this article. If the arguments found herein are persuasive, then one must re-contextualize the athletic imagery found throughout Hebrews 12: while to a Greco-Roman Gentile, the athletic imagery would call to mind the metaphor of the moral life as an athletic game, this language has undergone further development within Greco-Roman Judaism so that the athletic imagery evokes a specific contest—the contest endured by Israel in the wilderness. Thus, the athletic imagery and discussion of discipline contained within Heb 12.5–13 is anything but 'offensively banal'; rather, through such language the author signals to his readers that they are to re-envision their lives so as to place themselves in the wilderness, a place where God's people have always found themselves.[53] Israel's wilderness period thus functions similarly to the Greek institution of the gymnasium.[54] The fact that the readers of the epistle to the Hebrews find themselves in the gymnasium of the wilderness should encourage them since it demonstrates the legitimacy of their sonship to God and socializes them for their imminent entry into the promised rest.

51 Cf. Mende, 'Wen der Herr liebhat', 32–3.

52 Johnson, *Hebrews*, 319.

53 As Johnson, 'Scriptural World', 247, states: 'Hebrews therefore successfully imagines the world that scripture itself imagines. As a result, scripture is a world in which Hebrews and its hearers can dwell'.

54 Cf. W. W. Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture* (3 vols.; Oxford: Oxford University, 1939–45).