

Reconsidering the Hebrews Warning Passages: The Narrative Typology of Kadesh Barnea

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Abstract: This article demonstrates how the author of Hebrews used the rebellion at Kadesh Barnea to undergird his entire message. The Exodus generation all possessed salvific faith, but their unfaithfulness at Kadesh Barnea resulted in severe punishment. The author used these characters and events as a pattern for his Jewish audience in the first century. Recognizing this employment of narrative typology provides a method to validate the meaning of the much-debated warning passages without importing systematic theological conclusions.

INTRODUCTION

The warning passages in Hebrews 2, 3–4, 6, 10, and 12 have sparked extensive theological and interpretive debate. Most interpretations fit into one of four camps. First, saved believers who lose their salvation: according to this view, the author of Hebrews described true believers who commit full and final apostasy, resulting in the loss of their eternal salvation. Second, pseudo-Christians: interpreters with this view assert that the warning passages address those of superficial faith, but lacking genuine saving faith. Under the pressure of persecution, these pseudo-Christians abandon any vestiges of their artificial belief. Third, hypothetical warnings for true believers: proponents of this view contend that the author warned of a hypothetical apostasy which believers cannot actually commit. Fourth, unfaithful believers: according to this view, the warnings present not the possibility of losing one's eternal salvation,

but the prospect of severe judgment and / or loss of blessings or rewards. Each of these four views, of course, has multiple variations.¹

In terms of methodology, most interpreters approach the warning passages in Hebrews through the lens of their pre-existing systematic theology. But this presents a problematic approach because the importation of various soteriological views results in contradictory understandings of the author's intended meaning and his intended application for the original audience. How, then, can one possibly claim validity of interpretation? A catchphrase of this systematic theological interpretive approach is, "Interpret the unclear in light of the clear." But this, too, is problematic because interpreters diametrically disagree on which verses are clear and which are unclear. The Calvinist who sees the clarity of eternal security elsewhere in the New Testament imports that belief to the warnings in Hebrews. But the Arminian asserts the clarity of the Hebrews warning passages regarding Christian apostasy and exports that interpretation to the Calvinists' ostensibly "clear" texts. The subjectivity of one's starting point—the verses one believes are "clear"—hardly presents an interpretive resolution. In the end, importing systematic theological conclusions into one's exegesis epitomizes circular reasoning. Valid interpretation must move beyond having "this" list of verses opposed to "that" list of verses.

This article will argue that proper interpretation of the Hebrews warning passages does not require systematic theology, but rather a recognition of how the author used Old Testament illustrations within the book itself. Many scholars have recognized and sought to

¹ For a more thorough discussion of these views, their strengths and weaknesses, and their proponents, see Randall C. Gleason, "The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8," *BSac* 155 [1998]: 69–72. See also Herbert W. Bateman, ed., *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007).

explain the use of the OT in the book of Hebrews, including its typology. But so far as the present author can ascertain, only Gleason and Pentecost have applied the use of Old Testament narrative to explain the Hebrews warning passages.² Although differing in some aspects from the conclusions of Gleason and Pentecost, this article will build on their work and propose that the author of Hebrews employed the use of “narrative typology,” a term no scholar has yet applied to the book of Hebrews.³ Narrative typology is defined as an author’s use of “an earlier character or event [that] supplies the pattern for a later character or event.”⁴ In Hebrews, the Exodus generation—the character—is a pattern (or type) for the audience. Their fateful rebellion at Kadesh Barnea and subsequent punishment—the event—is a pattern (or type) for the situation faced by the audience of Hebrews. When authors allude to a previous text, they maintain the stable meaning and context of the alluded text for a rhetorical point in the developing text.⁵

Therefore, this article contends that the author of Hebrews employed narrative typology from the Exodus in the general, and Kadesh Barnea in particular, because it paralleled the situation faced by his audience. The author of Hebrews then, specifically used the events recorded in Numbers 13–14 to undergird his entire message because of the correspondence

² See Randall C. Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8,” *BSac* 155 [1998]: 62–91; Randall C. Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of Rest in Hebrews 3:7–4:11,” *BSac* 157 [2000]: 281–303; J. Dwight Pentecost, “Kadesh-Barnea in the Book of Hebrews,” in *Basic Theology Applied: A Practical Application of Basic Theology in Honor of Charles C. Ryrie and His Work*, eds. Wesley and Elaine Willis and John and Janet Master (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1995), 127–35. Although Pentecost’s work in this chapter is directed to a popular audience, he nevertheless is one of the two published authors suggesting use of the narrative of Kadesh Barnea to interpret the Hebrews warning passages.

³ In this author’s searches, nothing has been found in this regard, although no claim of exhaustive research can be made.

⁴ Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *Interpreting the Historical Books: An Exegetical Handbook*, edited by David M. Howard Jr., *Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2006), 230.

⁵ See David R. Klingler, “Validity in the Identification and Interpretation of a Literary Allusion in the Hebrew Bible” (PhD diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2010), 118.

between the Israelites at Kadesh Barnea and the audience of Hebrews. For this reason, the warning passages with their accompanying allusions to Kadesh Barnea exhibit a powerful rhetorical effect. If there existed no genuine correspondence between the Israelites and the audience of Hebrews, then (1) the author's warnings lose their rhetorical impact, and (2) the meaning of the warning passages is obscured. Indeed, modern interpretations of the warnings are so confused and contradictory precisely because of the failure to grasp the author's use of narrative typology.

This article, then, will demonstrate the genuine correspondence between the Exodus generation at Kadesh Barnea and the audience of Hebrews through narrative typology, which will validate the author's intended meaning for the warning passages. To that end, this article contains three major sections. First, an overview of the message of Hebrews. Second, the spiritual status of the Exodus generation. This is important because of the necessary correspondence between the Israelites and the audience of Hebrews. This section argues that the entire Israelite assembly in the Exodus possessed salvific faith but then rebelled at Kadesh Barnea. Despite their faith, they demonstrated an extreme act of unfaithfulness that resulted in divine discipline. And third, the narrative typology used in Hebrews. This section will articulate the author's use of narrative typology in the Hebrews warning passages.

OVERVIEW OF THE MESSAGE OF HEBREWS

The warning passages must, of course, contribute to the argument and message of Hebrews as a whole. Therefore, a brief overview of the occasion and message is provided here. In the mid- to late-60's AD, unbelieving Jews initiated persecution against a group of believing⁶

⁶ This article will develop the case that the audience included believers only.

Jews (Heb 10:32-35),⁷ but had not yet spilled their blood (Heb 12:4). To avoid further persecution, the Jewish Christians faced the temptation to renounce Christ and revert to their pre-messianic Judaism.⁸ In light of their temptation to go back to Judaism in exchange for physical security, the author of Hebrews had a simple overall message: “Don’t go back!” Such disobedience would signify a failure to obey the Son to whom they had pledged allegiance. It would also result in severe consequences. Instead, the author exhorted his audience to endure in their existing faith in Messiah for several reasons.⁹ First, endure because the Messiah is better than the elements, forms, and practices of pre-messianic Judaism to which they might return (Heb 1:1–10:39).¹⁰ Second, endure because of the faithful examples of those who endured before them and earned God’s approval (Heb 11:1–12:4). Third, endure because God disciplines his children (Heb 12:5-29). The various warning passages dispersed throughout Hebrews contribute to this third point: endure because of the fearful consequences of turning back. These warnings—explicitly in some cases, implicitly in others—rely upon the narrative typology of Kadesh Barnea. Lastly, the author articulated what endurance in Messiah practically looked like for his audience (Heb 13:1-17).

⁷ The audience was subjected to insults, affliction, suffering, and had their property seized.

⁸ That is, the Mosaic system of sacrifices and law-keeping.

⁹ “You have need of endurance” (Heb 10:36); “Therefore . . . let us run with endurance” (Heb 12:1). Unless otherwise noted, all English translations in this article are from *The Lexham English Bible* (Edited by W. Hall Harris III, Elliot Ritzema, et al. [Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012]).

¹⁰ Specifically, the Messiah is better than angels (1:1–2:18), better than Moses (3:1–4:16), better than Aaron’s priesthood (5:1–8:6); he’s the mediator of a better covenant (8:6-13), and he offered a better sacrifice (9:1–10:39).

SPIRITUAL STATUS OF THE EXODUS GENERATION

The spiritual status of the Exodus generation is important for two key reasons. First, because it is crucial for establishing a coherent narrative typology with the audience of Hebrews. Whatever an interpreter thinks about the spiritual status of the Israelites, the same must apply to the audience of Hebrews.¹¹ If their spiritual statuses differ, then no genuine correspondence exists between the two. In such a scenario, the author's illustrative use of Kadesh Barnea becomes muddled and perplexing. Second, because the spiritual status of the audience in Hebrews is pivotal for interpreting the warning passages. If addressed to pseudo-Christian unbelievers, for example, the warnings serve a different function than if intended for Christian believers.

Many have doubts regarding the universality of the Israelites' salvation. Valid questions arise regarding the rebels who perished in the wilderness: could they not represent a subset of unbelievers among the "mixed multitude" (Exod 12:38) who came out of Egypt? While this hypothesis warrants consideration, the evidence overwhelmingly refutes it. Building upon the research of Gleason and Bing, this section endeavors to present the biblical case for universal salvation in the Exodus generation followed by universal rebellion—excepting only Joshua and Caleb and those under the age of twenty.¹² Following are eight reasons supporting the universal salvation of the Israelites in the Exodus.

¹¹ Even some with differing conclusions agree on this point. For example, Dave Mathewson argues for the unsaved status of both the Israelites and the audience of Hebrews (Dave Mathewson, "Reading Heb 6:4–6 in Light of the Old Testament," *WTJ* 61, no. 2 (1999): 224. Mathewson also appeals to Mishnaic tradition where the rabbis opined that the ten spies and the entire generation that fell in the wilderness would have no share in the world to come. Others argue for an audience including both the saved and the unsaved (C. Adrian Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience with Reference to the Warning Passages in the Book of Hebrews* [New York: Peter Lang, 2008]).

¹² See Randall C. Gleason, "The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8," *BSac* 155 [1998]: 75–78; Randall C. Gleason, "The Old Testament Background of Rest in Hebrews 3:7–4:11," *BSac* 157 [2000]: 288–89; and Charles C. Bing, "Does Fire in Hebrews Refer to Hell?" *BSac* 167 (2010): 345–48.

First, the Exodus generation possessed universal salvation because of the descriptions used in Exodus 4–24. When the Israelites groaned under the workload placed on them by the Egyptians, their cry for help went up to God (Exod 2:23). Consequently, God revealed himself to Moses and tasked him with delivering the Israelites (Exod 3:1–4:17). When Moses and Aaron conveyed Yahweh’s message to all the elders of Israel (Exod 4:29-30), “The people believed ... and they knelt down and they worshiped” (Exod 4:31). This indicates that even prior to the plagues on Egypt, the Israelites believed in Yahweh.¹³ When Moses subsequently instructed them regarding the Passover sacrifice, “The people knelt down and they worshiped” (Exod 12:27), and, “They did as Yahweh had commanded” (Exod 12:28; 12:50). Their faith manifested in worship and obedience. Their faith in the blood of the Passover lamb saved them from the destroyer (Exod 12:23), thereby sparing them from death. After Yahweh rescued the Israelites from the Egyptians through the sea, “The people feared Yahweh, and they believed in Yahweh and in Moses his servant” (Exod 14:31). The lexical combination of *וַיִּאֱמְנוּ בַיהוָה*, “And they believed in Yahweh” (Exod 14:31) is like *וַיִּאֱמַן אַבְרָהָם בַיהוָה*, “And he [Abraham] believed in Yahweh, and he reckoned it to him as righteousness” (Gen 15:6).¹⁴ In the Song of Moses (Exod 15:1-21), the Israelites expressed worship for Yahweh in a manner characteristic of the saved. They acknowledged Yahweh alone as their God and extolled his various attributes.¹⁵ The song itself

¹³ The Hiphil form of the verb *אָמַן*, as in Exodus 4:31, means “to believe in” or “to trust in.”

¹⁴ That is, these verses contain the Hiphil form of *אָמַן*, the preposition *בְּ*, and the direct object *יהוָה*. The same combination is also used when the Ninevites believed in God (Jonah 3:5) and when the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem believed in Yahweh (2 Chron 20:20). Such verses exemplify the possession of saving faith in Yahweh.

¹⁵ For example, “Let me sing to Yahweh because he is highly exalted” (Exod 15:1); “Yah is my strength and song, and he has become my salvation; this is my God, and I will praise him—the God of my father—and I will exalt him” (Exod 15:2); “Yahweh, your right hand is glorious in power” (Exod 15:6); “Who is like you among the gods, Yahweh? Who is like you—glorious in holiness, awesome in praiseworthy actions, doing

identifies the Exodus generation as “redeemed” (Exod 15:13) and “bought” (Exod 15:16) by Yahweh. Later at Sinai, the Israelite assembly willingly entered into covenant relationship with Yahweh and committed to uphold the covenant’s stipulations: “All that Yahweh has spoken we will do, and we will listen” (Exod 24:7). Thus, from Exodus 4–24, the Israelites demonstrated faith, belief, worship, obedience, and the fear of the Lord. They entered a covenant relationship with Yahweh, and Yahweh “redeemed” and “bought” them. If the biblical author had intended to depict the Exodus generation as *lacking* salvific faith, then these descriptions defy explanation. Far more plausibly, he described people of faith.

Second, the Exodus generation possessed universal salvation because the descriptors of faith pertained to the entire Israelite community. The author made no attempt to articulate a difference between believing and unbelieving Israelites. Indeed, a lack of faith or obedience would have resulted in Israelites perishing on the night of Passover. Yet the author recorded no such occurrence.

Third, the Exodus generation possessed universal salvation because the rebellion and punishment at Kadesh Barnea was also universal.¹⁶ Hearing the bad report of the ten spies, “*All* the community lifted up their voices, and the people wept” (Num 14:1, emphasis added). And again, “*All* the Israelites grumbled against Moses and Aaron, and *all* the community said to them, “If only we had died in the land of Egypt or in this desert!”” (Num 14:2, emphasis added). Joshua and Caleb spoke their exhortation to “*All* the community of the Israelites” (Num 14:7, emphasis added), but “*All* the community said to stone them with stones” (Num 14:10, emphasis

wonders?” (Exod 15:11); “In your loyal love you led the people whom you redeemed; in your strength you guided them to the abode of your holiness” (Exod 15:13); “Sing to Yahweh because he is highly exalted” (Exod 15:21).

¹⁶ Excepting, of course, Joshua and Caleb, and all those under twenty years of age.

added). The author of Numbers unequivocally indicated the universality of the rebellion. If one equates the rebellion with lack of salvation, then incoherence results: an entire generation previously described in terms of salvific faith (see the first point above) is now entirely without saving faith.

Fourth, the Exodus generation possessed universal salvation because despite enacting punishment, Yahweh forgave their sin. In Moses' intercession for the people (Num 14:13-19), he appealed to Yahweh's character: "Yahweh is slow to anger and great of loyal love, forgiving sin and *rebellion*, but surely he leaves nothing unpunished" (Num 14:18, emphasis added; see also Exod 34:7). Yahweh indeed forgave their rebellion (Num 14:20) and then punished them (Num 14:22-23, 28-29, 33). In any case, the unfaithful assembly received forgiveness for their sin. Throughout the Bible, one may search in vain for instances of unbelievers having their sins forgiven by God. Despite the forgiveness, however, Yahweh enacted a just punishment due to the rebellion, declaring, "Because *all* the men who have seen my glory and my signs that I did in Egypt and in the desert yet tested me these ten times and did not listen to my voice, they will not see the land that I swore by oath to their ancestors, and *all* those who despised me will not see it" (Num 14:22-23, emphasis added). God's description of the punishment continued, "In this desert your corpses will fall, and *all* your counted ones, according to *all* your number, from twenty years old and above who grumbled against me" (Num 14:29, emphasis added). The author of Hebrews likewise noted that *all* (πάντες) those led out of Egypt by Moses were disobedient (Heb 3:16) yet also listed them among the faithful examples (Heb 11:28-29). Therefore, while the books of Exodus and Numbers portray a universal faith among the Israelites, they also depict a universal rebellion for which the entire generation aged twenty and above suffered punishment—except Joshua and Caleb. The hypothesis about a subset of rebellious unbelievers does not align

with the text. Rather, unfaithfulness plagued the believing Exodus generation, something even Yahweh pointed out: “And your children will be shepherds in the desert forty years, and you will bear your *unfaithfulness* until all your corpses have fallen in the desert” (Num 14:33, emphasis added).¹⁷

Fifth, the Exodus generation possessed universal salvation because they confessed their sin and attempted to repent. Upon hearing their punishment, the people mourned greatly (Num 14:39). The following morning, they confessed and made an effort to repent of their sin by saying, “Here we are. We will go up to the place that Yahweh said, because we have sinned” (Num 14:40).¹⁸ But Moses warned of their inability to conquer the Promised Land without the Lord (Num 14:41-43). The Israelites thus exhibited a recognition of their sin against God, they mourned over it, and they made a desperate—although ultimately doomed—effort to repent by pressing ahead into Canaan.

Sixth, the Exodus generation possessed universal salvation because Moses and Aaron committed the same sin and suffered the same punishment as the people: “Yahweh said to Moses and Aaron, “Because you have not trusted in me, to regard me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this assembly into the land that I have given to them”” (Num 20:12). And again, “Let Aaron be gathered to his people; he will not come into the land that I have given to the Israelites because you rebelled against my word at the waters of Meribah” (Num 20:24). Yahweh charged both Moses and Aaron with rebellion and lack of belief, thus sentencing them to death in the wilderness—the same sins and the same punishment as the

¹⁷ אִנְיָ, rendered here as “unfaithfulness,” carries the notion of fornication or infidelity.

¹⁸ Their effort at repentance is evident from their change of heart. The day before, they wanted to go back to slavery in Egypt. Now, they wanted to press on into the Promised Land.

Israelites at Kadesh Barnea. Yet few, if any, would accuse Moses and Aaron of being unbelievers. Like those at Kadesh Barnea, they possessed salvific faith. But through their sin, they exhibited unfaithfulness and God punished them accordingly.

Seventh, the Exodus generation possessed universal salvation because other Old Testament books affirm their faith. OT commentary on the Exodus generation reveals several common characteristics. First, biblical authors openly acknowledge the sins and rebellion of the Exodus generation.¹⁹ Second, they express Yahweh's ensuing anger toward the Israelites.²⁰ Third, they reveal God's punishment of the Israelites.²¹ Fourth, and despite this, they recall the Lord forgiving the people²² and providing for their needs in the wilderness.²³ And finally, they describe the Exodus generation as a saved²⁴ and believing²⁵ people, albeit one that failed to remember their God.²⁶ The Old Testament authors thus identified the Exodus generation as a people of faith, yet charged them with unfaithfulness. Such infidelity was disobedience that led to a corresponding punishment, but at no point does the text portray them as lacking in salvific faith.

Eighth, the Exodus generation possessed universal salvation because the New Testament likewise portrays their faith.²⁷ This even includes the author of Hebrews: "By faith he

¹⁹ Josh 5:6; Neh 9:16-18; Ps 78:8, 17-19, 22, 37, 40-41; 95:9; 106:7, 19; Jer 7:24; 11:8; Ezek 20:8, 13, 16.

²⁰ Ps 78:21, 31; 95:10-11; Ezek 20:8, 13.

²¹ Josh 5:6; Ps 78:31, 33; 95:11; 99:8; 106:18; Ezek 20:8, 15, 36)

²² Ps 78:38; 99:8; Neh 9:17.

²³ Neh 9:19-21; Ps 78:23-24; 105:39-41; Isa 63:14; Ezek 20:17.

²⁴ Ps 106:8, 10, 12; Isa 51:10.

²⁵ Ps 106:12.

²⁶ Ps 78:11, 42; 106:7, 13, 21.

²⁷ Or, the corollary, does not depict their lack of salvific faith.

[Moses] kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, in order that the one who destroyed the firstborn would not touch them” (Heb 11:28). The shift from singular “he” to plural “them” in this verse indicates that all who sprinkled blood on their doorpost did so by faith, and thus avoided the destroyer. Among the Egyptians, not a house was left untouched by death (Exod 12:30). By contrast, Scripture nowhere mentions Israelite deaths during the Passover. This suggests that the entire Israelite population was saved by faith in the blood of the Passover lamb. Additionally, the author of Hebrews highlighted, “By faith they [the Israelites] crossed the Red Sea as if on dry land” (Heb 11:29). This inclusion places the entire Exodus generation among the revered heroes of faith whom God approved because of their faith (Heb 11:2, 39). Because the author employed the narrative typology of Kadesh Barnea to his audience, his identification of the Exodus generation as a people of faith is extremely significant.

Elsewhere in the NT, Paul’s treatment of the Exodus generation in 1 Corinthians 10:1-12 likewise presupposed the faith of the Israelites. True, Paul acknowledged the Exodus generation’s idolatry, evil desires, sexual immorality, grumbling, and testing of Christ (1 Cor 5:6-10). But Paul also accused the Corinthian believers of some of those same sins.²⁸ In highlighting God’s judgment upon the Israelites in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:5), Paul portrayed their downfall as a warning²⁹ *for a believing audience* (1 Cor 10:11) and concluded, “Therefore, the one who thinks that he stands must watch out lest he fall” (1 Cor 10:12). Paul’s warning to Corinthian Christians against falling like the Israelites is pointless if the example pertained to unbelievers. Instead, his audience included carnal Christians engaged in all manner of sin, and

²⁸ 1 Cor 5:1, 11; 8:7, etc.

²⁹ Most translations render τῶν ἰσχυρῶν (1 Cor 10:11) as, “example.” “Warning” is another possible gloss. Given the context, the falling in the wilderness because of sin serving as a “warning” is a superior choice in modern English to, “example.”

some had already experienced consequences like sickness or death (1 Cor 11:30). The author of Hebrews and Paul therefore made the same typological use of the Exodus generation. They both wanted their audiences to take heed because God may discipline unfaithful, sinful believers—even to the point of death.

The book of Jude also includes the Exodus generation (Jude 5) and Korah (Jude 11) among other censurable examples, but Jude’s remarks do not imply a lack of salvation. First, he made no comment about the eternal destiny. Second, the triad of the Exodus generation, sinning angels, and Sodom and Gomorrah (Jude 5-7) frequently appear together in Jewish and Christian literature.³⁰ This triad simply communicates that God judges all rebellion, whether committed by Jews, Gentiles, or angels—and each group faced a different judgment. Third, the “unbelief” (μὴ πιστεύω) of the Israelites in Jude 5 pertains not to a lack of salvific faith. Rather, it points to Yahweh’s accusations of “unbelief” for both the Israelite assembly (Num 14:11) and even Moses and Aaron (Num 20:12). Such unbelief represented a failure to trust God and has been characterized as, “Disbelief in God’s leading.”³¹ Fourth, the “destruction” (ἀπόλλυμι) of the Israelites (Jude 5) and Korah (Jude 11) refers to their physical deaths, not judgment in the afterlife. Thus, to argue that Jude placed the Israelites or Korah among the eternally damned overstates the case because it requires dubious assumptions. Furthermore, such a conclusion would be at odds with the balance of scriptural testimony pointing to the Israelites as unfaithful believers.

³⁰ See, for example, Sirach 16:7-10; Cairo Genizah *Damascus Document* 2.17–3.12; 3 Maccabees 2:4-7; 2 Pet 2:4-10.

³¹ Herbert W. Bateman, “Rebellion and God’s Judgment in the Book of Jude,” *BSac* 170 (2013): 453–77.

In summary, this section has surveyed the portrayal of the Exodus generation in both the Old and New Testaments. It has presented eight reasons that construct a compelling case for understanding the Israelites as being universally saved. Excepting only Caleb and Joshua, those saved Israelites rebelled against Yahweh. This universal rebellion represented a severe act of unfaithfulness and led to God's discipline of a generation who nevertheless constituted a people saved by faith in Yahweh.

NARRATIVE TYPOLOGY IN HEBREWS

The first major section of this article provided an overview of the message of Hebrews. In brief, the audience of Hebrews faced the temptation of turning back from Christ to Judaism in order to avoid persecution. The author therefore wrote Hebrews to warn his audience, "Don't go back!" The second major section of this article made the case for universal salvation in the Exodus and universal rebellion at Kadesh Barnea. This third section now examines the use of narrative typology in the book of Hebrews.

In Hebrews, the author's appeal to run with endurance (Heb 12:1; see also Heb 10:36)³² echoes the sentiment of Joshua and Caleb at Kadesh Barnea: "Surely, let us go up and let us take possession of it [the Promised Land]" (Num 13:30).³³ The Israelites had already covenanted to obey all of Yahweh's words (Exod 24:7) just as the audience of Hebrews had confessed allegiance to Christ.³⁴ However, afraid of the physical danger posed by the land's

³² By running with endurance, he meant the audience should maintain the faith of their confession in Christ. This is the primary intended response for the audience.

³³ Their exhortation continued in Numbers 14:7-9.

³⁴ The audience had made been baptized (Heb 10:22) and made a confessional pledge of allegiance to Jesus (Heb 3:1; 4:14; 10:23; 13:15).

inhabitants (Num 13:31-33; 14:3),³⁵ the Israelites first considered, “Would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?” (Num 14:3). They contemplated going back for their physical safety, just as the audience of Hebrews considered returning to Judaism for theirs.³⁶ Subsequently, the Israelites determined to rebel against Moses: “Let us appoint a leader, and we will return to Egypt” (Num 14:4), and they set out to stone Joshua, Caleb, Moses, and Aaron (Num 14:10). This rebellion showed that they despised God and his salvation, and led to Yahweh forfeiting their entrance to the Promised Land. Instead, he condemned them to death in the wilderness.

The audience of Hebrews in the first century likewise faced their own “Kadesh Barnea” moment. Their situation corresponds to Numbers 14:3: “Would it not be better for us to return to [Judaism]?” Such a rebellion meant despising Christ and his salvation (Heb 6:6; 10:29). But like Joshua and Caleb to the Israelites, the author of Hebrews urged his audience, “Don’t go back!” He instead encouraged faithful endurance in the Messiah who is better than anything they might return to. The author used the Exodus generation and the Kadesh Barnea incident in particular to undergird his entire message. That generation’s punishment in failing to enter God’s rest serves as the typological pattern for the potential punishment of the audience of Hebrews. On the one hand, the audience legitimately had the opportunity to confidently approach God’s throne of grace (Heb 4:16) and enter his rest (Heb 4:1, 11). They had not yet passed the point of no return. At Kadesh Barnea, the Israelites moved from contemplation of rebellion (Num 14:3)

³⁵ “And the men who went up with him said, “We are not able to go up to the people because they are stronger than us.” And they presented the report of the land that they explored to the Israelites, saying, “The land that we went through to explore is a land that eats its inhabitants, and all the people whom we saw in its midst are men of enormous size. There we saw the Nephilim (the descendants of Anak came from the Nephilim), and we were like grasshoppers in our own sight, and so we were in their eyes”” (Num 13:31-33). Also, “Why did Yahweh bring us into this land to fall by the sword? Our wives and our little children will become plunder; would it not be better for us to return to Egypt?” (Num 14:3).

³⁶ That is, they could avoid further persecution from the unbelieving Jews if they renounced their allegiance to Jesus and went back to Judaism.

to actual rebellion (Num 14:10). Should the audience make that same move by denying Christ and going back to Judaism, they would face only the fearful expectation of judgment (Heb 10:27) without the opportunity to repent of their choice (Heb 6:4-6).³⁷ The author of Hebrews confronted his audience with a critical decision, just as Caleb and Joshua did at Kadesh Barnea.

The author spent much ink arguing that Jesus is greater than angels, greater than Moses, greater than Aaron, and so on (Heb 1–10). At Kadesh Barnea, the Israelites rebelled against an angel, Moses, and Aaron, and suffered severely for it. Employing an *a fortiori* argument, the author warned his audience: how could they expect a lesser punishment for rebelling against the Son who is greater? The warning passages, examined below, form an essential part of the author’s argument about the consequences of turning back from Christ.

THE FIRST WARNING

The author first warned his audience, “Because of this, it is all the more necessary that we pay attention to the things we have heard, lest we drift away” (Heb 2:1). “Because of this,” διὰ τοῦτο, refers back to chapter one’s emphasis that the Son is greater than angels. The verb for “pay attention” is προσέχω, a word also used in the LXX of Yahweh’s warning to the Israelites to pay attention to, and not rebel against, his angel: “Be attentive (πρόσεχε) to him [the angel] and listen to his voice;³⁸ do not rebel against him, because he will not forgive your

³⁷ Just like the Israelites who tried to repent by foolishly charging into the Promised Land (Num 14:40).

³⁸ In Exodus 23:21, the MT’s הִשָּׁמֶר לְפָנָיו, “Pay attention from before him” is rendered in the LXX as πρόσσεχε σεαυτῷ, “Pay attention to yourself.” Nevertheless, the MT and LXX both direct the Israelites to listen to the angel and not disobey him.

transgression” (Exod 23:21).³⁹ Yahweh promised this angel would lead the Israelites into the Promised Land, protect them, and go before them to destroy the Canaanites (Exod 23:20-23). The rebellion at Kadesh Barnea therefore expressed the Israelites’ unfaithfulness by rebelling against this angel and failing to trust in his protection. The Israelites had “heard” Yahweh’s promise of the angel in Exodus 23. The audience of Hebrews, likewise, had “heard” God’s voice through the Son (Heb 1:2).⁴⁰ It was this Son that the audience considered rebelling against. The warning continues: “For if the word spoken through angels was binding and every transgression and act of disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” (Heb 2:3). The word for “neglect” (ἀμελέω) conveys the concept of being unconcerned about something, or having no care for it. The Israelites who came to Kadesh Barnea but determined to return to slavery in Egypt perfectly depict a people unconcerned and neglectful of Yahweh’s salvation. God had not only saved them out of Egypt, but part of that salvation included the promise of an angel destroying the Canaanites and safely bringing them to a place of rest in the Promised Land (Exod 23:20-23). For those Israelites, neglecting Yahweh’s salvation by turning back to Egypt resulted in a failure to “escape” on all fronts: those who foolishly charged into the land met with defeat by the Canaanites, and those who didn’t still faced condemnation in the wilderness. In either case, they had no “escape” from their ruinous decision to turn back. They neither made it safely to Canaan nor back to Egypt. Once they

³⁹ For the purposes of this article, the identity of this angel is out of scope. It is enough to know that the Israelites rebelled against this particular ἄγγελος at Kadesh Barnea after Yahweh had promised this angel would protect them.

⁴⁰ The author made it clear that the audience did not hear Jesus directly, but through the testimony and confirmation of others (Heb 2:3-4).

decided to turn back, God punished them regardless of their subsequent actions—including their attempted effort at repentance (Num 14:40).

The audience of Hebrews likewise faced a choice to go back to their pre-messianic Judaism or press on in their faith in Jesus. However, the author warned of no escape for those who neglected the salvation already obtained in Jesus Christ by ignoring the message proclaimed by the Son (Heb 1:2). Since the Israelites rebelled against the angel and were punished, and the Son is greater than angels (Heb 1:4-14), how could those who neglect their salvation in Jesus expect to escape punishment (Heb 2:2-4)?

Understanding that the author of Hebrews used the narrative typology of Kadesh Barnea for the underpinnings of his entire message, the nature of this first warning becomes clear. The author didn't warn unbelievers about their refusal to believe in Jesus, as some might understand, "Neglect so great a salvation" (Heb 2:3). Instead, the Kadesh Barnea incident perfectly makes the author's point: believers who despise Jesus and his salvation by going back to pre-messianic Judaism would experience calamitous consequences. The threat of such dreadful retribution contributes to his argument that the audience should not turn back from Jesus.

THE SECOND WARNING

The second warning (Heb 3:7–4:11) carries a more severe tone than the first. It employs forceful language⁴¹ which some would interpret as suggesting either an audience of unbelievers or the risk of believers losing their salvation. However, this section will demonstrate

⁴¹ Examples of strong language include hardened hearts and rebellion (Heb 3:8), the Lord's anger (Heb 3:10, 11), going astray (Heb 3:10), never entering God's rest (Heb 3:11), an evil, unbelieving heart (Heb 3:12), falling away from the living God (Heb 3:12), and not entering rest because of unbelief (Heb 3:19).

how the warning uses typological and linguistic connections from the believing yet rebellious Israelites to the believing and potentially rebellious audience of Hebrews.

Overall, this second warning urged the audience to not “fall into the same pattern of disobedience” (Heb 4:11) as the Israelites whose “dead bodies fell in the wilderness” (Heb 3:17). For those Israelites, their hearts were hardened (σκληρύνω) in rebellion (Heb 3:8; cf. Ps 94:8 LXX [English 95:8]). The LXX uses the same word in adjectival form (σκληρῶν) to describe Korah and his rebels (Num 16:26 LXX). At Kadesh Barnea, Yahweh twice referred to the rebellious assembly as “evil,” πονηρός (Num 14:27, 35).⁴² He also accused both Moses and Aaron (Num 20:12) and the Israelites (Num 14:11) of “not believing” (οὐ πιστεύω). Since the Israelites had previously believed in Yahweh (Exod 14:31),⁴³ all of this forceful language may be applied to believers—Israelites and the audience of Hebrews. The “not believing” referred not to salvific faith, but a lack of faithfulness. In this sense, the Israelites failed to enter God’s rest in the Promised Land because of their “unfaithfulness,” ἀπιστίας (Heb 3:19).⁴⁴⁺⁴⁵ The believing Israelites had hardened, evil, unfaithful hearts leading to their demise in the wilderness under the Lord’s care, and their situation serves as a typological pattern for the audience of Hebrews.

⁴² “How long will I bear this evil (πονηρὸν) community...?” (Num 14:27); “Surely this I will do to all this evil (πονηρῶ) congregation who are gathered together against Me. In this wilderness they shall be destroyed, and there they will die” (Num 14:35).

⁴³ See the previous section of this article for the arguments that the entire Israelite congregation was saved by faith.

⁴⁴ The Greek lexicon notes two definitions and renderings for ἀπιστίας. First, an “Unwillingness to commit oneself to another or respond positively to the other’s words or actions, *lack of belief, unbelief, ...* [and second, a] Lack of commitment to a relationship or pledge, *unfaithfulness*” (Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 103). Contra Bauer, the second use perfectly fits Hebrew 3:19.

⁴⁵ Most English translations render ἀπιστίας in Hebrews 3:12, “unbelieving” (or some near variant), but NABRE most accurately translates it, “unfaithful.” Indeed, the author of Hebrews commended the Israelites’ faith (Heb 11:29) and maintained that God had approved it (Heb 11:2, 39). So, he must be referring to unfaithfulness rather than lack of salvific belief.

As for the audience, the prospect of entering rest still remained (Heb 4:1, 3, 9, 11), just as it had for the Israelites in Numbers 13:30. However, the audience faced the peril of “falling short of it” (Heb 4:1) should they “fall into the same pattern of disobedience” (Heb 4:11) as the Israelites. The author therefore warned against having an evil (*πονηρός*), unfaithful (*ἀπιστίας*) heart (Heb 3:12). His caution against becoming hardened by “the deception of sin” (Heb 3:13) contextually referred to rebellion against Christ by abandoning him and going back to Judaism for the sake of self-preservation, just as the Israelites had (Num 14:3). The author, then, used the punishment upon the Israelites as an example of the audience’s punishment should they choose to rebel. The audience risked not eternal damnation, but divine discipline in two ways: (1) life outside of God’s rest, and (2) physical death. In this way, the severe language and the underlying narrative typology in this warning effectively convey the author’s message to his believing audience. He cautioned them against turning away from Jesus, as such a decision would result in dire consequences. Therefore, the warning also contributes to his overall message to endure in Christ and not go back to Judaism.

THE THIRD WARNING

Like the second warning, the third uses heightened language to draw out the fearful consequences of turning back from Jesus: “For it is impossible concerning those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and become sharers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the coming age, those who have fallen away, to renew them again to repentance, because they have crucified again for themselves the Son of God and held him up to contempt” (Heb 6:4-6). With the narrative typology of Kadesh Barnea serving as the foundational illustration to the entire book of Hebrews, the Israelites once again function as the example, or pattern, for the audience of Hebrews.

The major parallels between the Israelites and the audience of Hebrews in this warning are striking. Both groups witnessed the supernatural work of God, demonstrated a contemptible attitude toward him, and faced the impossibility of restoration following rebellion.⁴⁶ Just as the audience had been enlightened (Heb 6:4; 10:32) and had tasted the heavenly gift (Heb 6:4) and the powers of the coming age (Heb 6:5; 2:4), the Israelites tasted manna and witnessed the manifold miracles of Yahweh during the Exodus and at Sinai. They had witnessed “All the signs that I [Yahweh] have done in their midst” (Num 14:11). Despite witnessing these miracles, the Israelites despised the Lord (Num 14:11, 23), just as the audience beheld the testimony of signs, wonders, and miracles (Heb 2:4) but still considered crucifying the Son again by holding him up to contempt (Heb 6:6). The Israelites despised Yahweh by refusing to heed his voice (Num 14:22-23), a motif echoed throughout Hebrews. For example, the author cited Psalm 95 multiple times, “Today, if you hear his [God’s] voice ...” (Heb 3:7, 15; 4:7). He pointed to the Israelites having heard God’s voice but disobeying it (Heb 3:16) and expressed concern that his audience had grown sluggish in hearing (Heb 5:11). For that reason, he stressed in the first warning, “It is all the more necessary that we pay attention to the things we have *heard*” (Heb 2:1, emphasis added). In the second warning, he cautioned of the Israelites, “The message they *heard* did not benefit them, because they were not united with those who *heard* it in faith” (Heb 4:2, emphasis added). Although the Exodus generation all heard the promises of God, only Joshua and Caleb heard in faith, while the rest heard in unfaithfulness. This situation parallels the audience of Hebrews. The good news of Jesus Christ had not only been proclaimed to them (Heb 4:2), but they heard the testimony of signs, wonders, and miracles (Heb 2:4), and had confessed

⁴⁶ For a thorough detailing of the linguistic and semantic parallels of the third warning, see Gleason, “The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8,” *BSac* 155 [1998]: 76–78.

faith in Christ (Heb 3:1, 4:14; 10:23; 13:15). However, by contemplating a return to Judaism, they risked demonstrating a failure to listen to God's voice, thus exhibiting a contemptible attitude toward the Son.

Perhaps the most controversial and debated aspect of this warning, the "impossibility of repentance" (Heb 6:6), alludes to the Israelites who tried to enter Canaan after being condemned to wander the wilderness for forty years. Following their final decision to rebel and return to Egypt (Num 14:10), Yahweh forgave the Israelites their sin (Num 14:20) but punished them with death in the wilderness (Num 14:22-23, 29, 32-35). After lamenting their condemnation (Num 14:39), the Israelites "Rose early in the morning and went to the top of the mount, saying, 'Here we are. We will go up to the place that Yahweh said, because we have sinned'" (Num 14:40). Through this effort, they attempted to repent (cf. Heb 6:6). But Moses warned of their efforts, "It will not succeed. You should not go up because Yahweh is not in your midst ... because *you have turned back from Yahweh*, and Yahweh will not be with you" (Num 14:41-43, emphasis added). In Hebrews, the author was primarily concerned that his audience not turn back from Christ. Through the narrative typology of Kadesh Barnea, the third warning declared that the audience's turning back from the Son represented an irreversible choice, as it had at Kadesh Barnea. Even though God would forgive such sin as he did the Israelites, they could not escape the consequences of turning back. No amount of repentance would change the punishment. This third warning, then, also contributes to the author's message to endure in Christ and not turn back because of the irreparable consequences of doing so.

THE FOURTH AND FIFTH WARNINGS

The fourth (Heb 10:26-31) and fifth (Heb 12:25-29) warnings also employ narrative typology from the Exodus generation. For the audience of Hebrews, the deliberate sin (Heb

10:26) in the fourth warning meant abandoning the Son and turning back to pre-messianic Judaism. For the Exodus generation, their deliberate sin meant rebelling at Kadesh Barnea by seeking new leaders whom they could follow back to slavery in Egypt (Num 14:4, 10). The author warned that turning back would result in “A certain fearful expectation of judgment and a fury of fire that is about to consume the adversaries” (Heb 10:27). The fifth warning also concludes, “For indeed our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:29). Many assume that the *πυρὸς ζῆλος*, “fiery zeal,” and the language of God as a “consuming fire” refer to judgment in the flames of hell. However, in the Exodus, Yahweh was a “Consuming fire on the top of the mountain” (Exod 24:17) in the presence of his people. His consuming fire burned the believing priests Nadab and Abihu (Lev 10:1-2) when they acted unfaithfully. When the Israelites complained of their hardship in the wilderness, Yahweh’s anger burned and he sent a consuming fire to their camp (Num 11:1). At Korah’s rebellion, the fire of the Lord consumed 250 rebels (Num 16:35). As discussed above, Korah and his rebels were unfaithful believers. Yahweh is also identified as a “devouring fire” (*אֵשׁ שׂוֹפָה*) in the context of Moses’ failure to enter the Promised Land (Deut 4:21-22) and his exhortation to the next generation to stay faithful to the covenant: “So watch yourselves, that you do not forget the covenant of the Lord your God which He made with you ... *For the Lord your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God*” (Deut 4:23-24, emphasis added). Studying the use of fire in Hebrews and elsewhere, one scholar concluded, “Though fire in the Bible sometimes refers to the fiery punishment of unbelievers, fire is more often a threat or punishment against those who are called God’s people ... [it] is used of God’s temporal discipline characterized by His anger, zeal, and jealousy, or used of trials that test or

purify believers.”⁴⁷ Indeed, one of the author’s major arguments for enduring faithfully is because God disciplines his children (Heb 12:5-29). Likewise, the fourth warning includes a sober reminder that “The Lord will judge *his* people” (Heb 10:30, emphasis added).

If believing Israelites could die for showing contempt to the Mosaic Law (Heb 10:28), how much more deserving of death are those who disdained the Son of God (Heb 10:29)? The fourth and fifth warnings, then, continue exactly in line with the first three. The audience deliberated over the contemptible act of turning back from the Son. But God may punish believers—up to and including death—who exhibit tremendous infidelity. These warnings, like the first three, warn of the severe consequences should the audience turn from Christ. In this way, they serve the author’s message to endure in Christ and not go back to Judaism.

CONCLUSION

In the mid-60’s AD, a community of believing Jews faced persecution from their unbelieving counterparts. As a result, the believers faced the temptation of renouncing their faith in Christ and returning to pre-messianic Jewish practices. For his part, the author of Hebrews spilled substantial ink arguing that Jesus is greater than the elements, forms, and practices of the pre-messianic Judaism to which they might return (Heb 1:1–10:39). These arguments, however, undergird his overall paraenetic purpose that the believing audience endure in their existing faith in Jesus and not turn back to Judaism. Part of his rhetorical strategy included the use of five warning passages intended to portray the terrifying and irrevocable consequences should the audience turn back. In the terms of classical rhetoric, the author employed *pathos* in these

⁴⁷ Bing, “Does Fire in Hebrews Refer to Hell?” *BSac* 167 (2010): 357.

warnings. Rhetorical strategies using *pathos* are intended to arouse an emotional reaction and play upon the audience's feelings.⁴⁸ The warnings served the author's purpose of generating fear at the consequences of turning back from Christ.

The author intended for his audience to look to the example of the Israelites and their severe punishment after the rebellion at Kadesh Barnea. As shown in this article, the Scriptures indicate the believing Israelites acted unfaithfully in their rebellion at Kadesh Barnea. Consequently, God justly punished them. Employing narrative typology, the author used the Exodus generation and their rebellion at Kadesh Barnea as the typological pattern for his audience. Like the Israelites, they faced a critical decision point, akin to their own "Kadesh Barnea" moment. They could potentially rebel against God by rejecting his Son, ostensibly in exchange for physical security. But rebellion does not go unpunished, and the warnings serve to remind the audience that God disciplines his children. The author thus crafted the five warning passages to illustrate the dire results of turning away from Christ.

As demonstrated in this article, recognition of the underlying narrative typology of Kadesh Barnea provides clarity of interpretation for the much-debated warning passages, and it does so without importing systematic theological conclusions. Furthermore, the meaning of these warnings was internally validated by showing how they consistently contribute to the author's message for his original audience. These warnings addressed believing Christians,⁴⁹ and they do not communicate the potential loss of salvation. Like Joshua and Caleb urging the Israelites to press on into the Promised Land, the author exhorted his audience to endure in their faith in

⁴⁸ For a full discussion of classical rhetoric in biblical studies, see George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*, Studies in Religion (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984).

⁴⁹ Not unbelievers, and not a mixed believing and unbelieving audience.

Jesus. The warnings convey to the believing audience the irreversible and potentially fatal consequences should they turn back to Judaism.