THE NEXT GENERATION: IRENAEUS ON THE REBELLION IN THE DESERT OF PARAN

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The spy story and the Israelites’ rebellion in the wilderness of Paran recounted in Num 13:1–14:45 and Deut 1:19–46 receives scant notice among Christian authors before Irenaeus of Lyon.1 Second-century authors mostly address the name change of Hoshea, son of Nun, while NT allusions to the episode generally point to the rebellion and punishment, ignoring Joshua. The extended narrative of the episode in chapter 27 of Irenaeus’s Epideixis (Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching) is therefore unexpected.2 Further, it is not immediately obvious why Irenaeus included this episode in his very selective narrative of biblical history. It requires closer examination of the literary features of Epid. 27, its themes, and its place in the treatise to begin to discover Irenaeus’s insight into the story and his purpose for including it in his treatise.3

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2 The Epideixis survives only in a seventh-century Armenian translation. The critical edition is K. Ter-Mekerttschian and S. G. Wilson, ΕΙΣ ΕΠΙΔΕΙΞΙΝ ΤΟΥ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΙΚΟΥ ΚΗΡΥΓΜΑΤΟΣ: The Proof of the Apostolic Preaching with Seven Fragments (PO 12/5; Paris: Firmin Didot, 1919). The most recent edition is A. Rousseau, Irénée de Lyon, Démonstration de la prédication apostolique (SC 406; Paris: Cerf, 1995); for accessibility, quotations used here will come from an ET based largely on it; J. Behr, St. Irenaeus of Lyons: On the Apostolic Preaching (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1997).

Irenaeus’s Narrative

On its face, *Epid.* 27 seems to be a simple paraphrase of Num 13–14 with some omissions. It is not. Irenaeus incorporates the major features shared by both versions of the story, but follows the basic outline of Deut 1:19–46, adding details from Num 13–14 and some amplifications. His narrative may be classified as an example of implicit compositional use of the Scriptures in a biblical expansion. Its features begin to reveal his purposes.

As he tells the story, the Israelites draw “near to the land”; he does not name the location, which the biblical accounts place in the wilder-