

FLEEING FORWARD:
THE DEPARTURE OF CHRISTIANS
FROM JERUSALEM TO PELLA

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As Christians we consider the congregation of Jerusalem to be our mother-church. On Pentecost a great number of people in Jerusalem were filled with the Holy Spirit and confessed their faith in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, the Son of God. Many people were baptized in his name and thus there arose a thriving congregation in the city. The Christian congregation of Jerusalem formed a close-knit fellowship. The book of Acts tells us that they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer (Acts 2:41, 42). Because they had favor with all the people, a spectacular growth of the congregation took place. We read of three thousand people who accepted the Word and were baptized (Acts 2:41), a number which grew to about five thousand (counting only the men; Acts 4:4). Many thousands of Jews believed in Jesus the Messiah (Acts 21:20). In many ways the congregation of Jerusalem is a model congregation.

Initially our mother-church was led by the Twelve. Later James, the brother of the Lord, bore the responsibility for the congregation, together with authoritative elders of Jerusalem. This continued up and till the sixties of the first century. In A.D. 62 James became the fatal victim of a murderous assault. A turbulent period followed. We wonder about various things in connection with these events. What happened to the congregation of Jerusalem after the death of James? What were the consequences of the Jewish war for the Christians of Jewish descent? Where was the congregation to be found after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple around A.D. 70?

These questions are posed in connection with being interested about the position of Jewish Christians in the apostolic period. This is an important area for theology, because Christianity has Jewish roots. Sadly, there is not that much data available. That's why we must make careful use of our primary sources: the New Testament and the witness of the ancient church.¹ The investigation in this

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¹ We are primarily informed about the congregation of Jerusalem by texts from the Christian tradition. The information preserved in Jewish sources concerns especially the mutual relations between orthodox Jews and Jewish Christians in the land after the destruction of the temple. A discussion of this issue demands a separate investigation.

article will weigh and make as much use as is possible of the material coming from these sources, where our mother-church is concerned. How did she experience the Jewish war?

I. *The Witness of the Ancient Church*

For ages the accepted view has been that the Jewish Christians left Jerusalem in time to escape the Roman assault, traveling from Jerusalem to Pella in Transjordan. For example, when Rev. H. P. Scholte, a father of the *Afscheiding* (secession from the Dutch Reformed Church) in the Netherlands, being persecuted for his faith in his own country, emigrated to the U.S.A. in 1847 because he expected to find there a "place of refuge," he established a settlement which he called Pella.² This movement of people was an accepted fact in the historiography of the first century: the "flight to Pella."

At the beginning of the fourth century, the church historian Eusebius writes:

The people of the church in Jerusalem were commanded by an oracle given by revelation before the war to those in the city who were worthy of it to depart and dwell in one of the cities of Perea which they called Pella. To it those who believed on Christ travelled from Jerusalem, so that when holy men had altogether deserted the royal capital of the Jews and the whole land of Judaea, the judgement of God might at last overtake them for all their crimes against the Christ and his Apostles, and all that generation of the wicked be utterly blotted out from among men. (*Hist. eccl.* 3.5.3)³

Subsequently, Eusebius refers to the historical work of Flavius Josephus on *The Jewish War*. Eusebius sees the disasters which hit the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish people as God's judgment upon their unbelieving response to God's anointed, Jesus Christ.

Next to this description we have available another witness, coming from bishop Epiphanius of Salamis on Cyprus (end of the fourth century). He calls the departure to Pella a cause for the existence of two Jewish-Christian sects in Transjordan: the Nazarenes (Nazorenes) and the Ebionites. He describes and attacks the teaching of both groups. His book carries the both original and significant title *Medicine Chest*, because he wants to provide his readers with an antidote to contagious heresies.⁴

² For the fascinating history of Pella (Iowa), see I. R. Scholte, *A Stranger in a Strange Land: The Story of a Dutch Settlement in Iowa, under the Leadership of H. P. Scholte* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939 [reprint, Neerlandia: Inheritance Publications, 1987]), 42; H. S. Lucas, *Netherlanders in America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1955), 175-79; L. Oostendorp, *H. P. Scholte: Leader of the Secession of 1834 and Founder of Pella* (Franeker: Wever, 1964 [Ph.D. diss., Free University, Amsterdam]), 147-54.

³ All citations of Eusebius are taken from the translation by Kirsopp Lake in the Loeb edition.

⁴ Epiphanius, *Medicine Chest*, 29.7.7-8 (about the Nazarenes) and 30.2.7 (about the Ebionites). The Greek text and the English translation of this and other relevant passages are to be found in H. Koester, "The Origin and Significance of the Flight to Pella Tradition," *CBQ* 51 (1989): 90-106.

With respect to the Nazarenes, Epiphanius mentions that after the departure from Jerusalem all the disciples went and lived in Pella, because Christ had said to leave Jerusalem and stay away, since the city was to be besieged. Listening to this advice they went to the Decapolis and stayed there. The heresy of the Nazarenes began there.

Regarding the Ebionites, Epiphanius says that that heresy arose after the capture of Jerusalem. When all who believed in Christ began to live primarily in Pella, a city of the Decapolis which is mentioned in the Gospel record, and to which they had fled and had stayed, circumstances developed which led to Ebion's appearance.⁵

In another place Epiphanius mentions the return of the Christians to Jerusalem in connection with the visit which Aquila, the author of an authoritative Greek translation of the Bible, brought to Jerusalem in the second century. He met a group of Christians. How did they come to be there? They had returned from Pella to Jerusalem, according to Epiphanius. When the city was threatened with capture and destruction by the Romans, all the disciples were warned ahead of time by an angel of God to leave Jerusalem. When they had left, they settled in Pella on the other side of the Jordan.⁶

Since the middle of the previous century, the historicity of the flight to Pella has, however, been contested. In 1951 there appeared an influential book, *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church*, by S. G. F. Brandon, in which the historicity of the Pella-tradition is called in question. His underlying hypothesis was that there were close connections between the Christians and the zealots (fanatic freedom-fighters), so that the Christians would have been active participants in the Jewish uprising against the Romans. In this regard, the Christians were, according to Brandon, loyal to Judaism. Resistance to Rome was clearly in the national interest. Only after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple would Christianity have emerged, reborn. Because the nationalistic limitations of Judaism had fallen away, Christianity could grow into a world religion.

In this view of the events, there is of course no room for a flight from Jerusalem. Brandon regards such a flight of a sizeable group of people out of a region controlled by the Romans, and in a northern direction, to be practically impossible. The Roman general Vespasian marched from north to south; the path of flight would therefore rather have been in a southerly direction. According to Brandon, it is possible that Jewish-Christian refugees stayed in Pella, but they would have rather come from Galilee than from Jerusalem.⁷

⁵ Epiphanius mistakenly sees Ebion as the name for the founder of the Ebionites. See also note 39.

⁶ Epiphanius, *Weights and Measures*, 14-15. H. Koester, "Origin and Significance," 97, dates the visit of Aquila to Jerusalem in the year A.D. 129. See also notes 22 and 23.

⁷ S. G. F. Brandon, *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church: A Study of the Effects of the Jewish Overthrow of A.D. 70 on Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1951 [2d ed 1957]), 172-73.

In 1967 Brandon published a book with the title *Jesus and the Zealots*, in which he repeated his standpoint and elaborated on it. Even though the opinion that the Jesus-movement was closely connected to the zealots is at present hardly shared by anyone, Brandon has sown serious doubt about the historical value of the Pella-tradition.⁸

A publication from the Netherlands about *De verwoesting van Jeruzalem en haar gevolgen* (*The Destruction of Jerusalem and Its Consequences*) by H. Mulder (1977) was strongly influenced by Brandon. According to Mulder, the Pella-tradition is a literary creation of Eusebius. Ten years later Mulder recorded his view in a sketch about the life of the church in Jerusalem during the first century A.D., which became part of volume III of the authoritative *Bijbels Handboek* (*Handbook to the Bible*) (1987). According to Mulder, the mother-church of Jerusalem perished together with the city in the Jewish war. "What remained were weak groups, without much cohesion, without spiritual resilience or toughness, spread throughout the country."⁹

In 1988 there appeared a monograph on this subject by Jozef Verheyden, with the title: *De vlucht van de christenen naar Pella. Onderzoek van het getuigenis van Eusebius and Epiphanius* (*The Flight of the Christians to Pella: An Investigation of the Witness of Eusebius and Epiphanius*).¹⁰ As the subtitle indicates, Verheyden offers in particular an investigation of the texts that may or may not lie at the basis of the Pella-tradition. According to him, these texts have more theological than historical value.

Verheyden believes that Epiphanius is dependent on Eusebius. In that case, there is in fact only one source of the Pella-tradition, and that is Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*. But can we trust Eusebius on this point? His historical writing is tendentious. He uses the flight to Pella to make clear to his readers that, on the one hand, God always knows how to deliver the just, and, on the other hand, that He will never leave the godless unpunished.¹¹

⁸ S. G. F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967). See, however, the nuanced criticism of Brandon by M. Simon, "La Migration à Pella—Légende ou réalité?" *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 60 (1972): 37-54, repr. in *Le Christianisme antique et son contexte religieux: Scripta Varia* (2 vols.; Tübingen: Mohr, 1981), 2:477-94.

⁹ H. Mulder, *De verwoesting van Jeruzalem en haar gevolgen* (Amsterdam: Ton Bolland, 1972), 96; idem, "De eerste gemeente (tot het einde van de eerste eeuw)," in *Bijbels Handboek. Deel III: Het Nieuwe Testament* (ed. A.S. van der Woude e.a., Kampen: Kok, 1987), 126-56.

¹⁰ J. Verheyden, *De vlucht van Jeruzalem naar Pella. Onderzoek van het getuigenis van Eusebius en Epiphanius* (Brussel: Paleis der Academien, 1988). Doctoral dissertation published under the auspices of F. Neiryneck, published in the distinguished series *Verhandelingen van de Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten* of Belgium. Later the author published an English summary of this study, "The Flight of the Christians to Pella," *ETL* 66 (1990): 368-84.

¹¹ This last point is applicable to the Jews, as already appears in Eusebius's introduction. "To this I will add the fate which has beset the whole nation of the Jews from the moment of their plot against our Saviour." This takes place especially in the passage where the flight to Pella is named (*Hist. eccl.* 3.5-10): the defeat of the Jews in their war against the Romans and the fall of Jerusalem together with the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70. This as a divine judgment of the Jewish people.

Eusebius read in Josephus's writings that many Jews went on purpose to Jerusalem, while some fled the city. He wanted to have it appear that—thanks to God's righteousness—the Jews together with Jerusalem and the temple went to defeat, whereas Christianity conquered the world. To this end he construed a flight of Christians from Jerusalem to Pella with help from Jesus' eschatological speech in the Gospels, especially what we read in Luke 21:21, 22: "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city. For this is the time of punishment in fulfillment of all that has been written." In short, Eusebius depicts the situation in such a way that the flight of the Christians to Pella is the beginning of the end of the Jewish people.

The contribution of Eusebius was, according to the critics, threefold:

- a. A miraculous escape of the Christians out of Jerusalem;
- b. The congregation can start residing in Pella (Transjordan);
- c. Directly following this occur the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple.

II. Counter-argumentation

We look now in succession at the foremost arguments against the Pella-tradition:

1. It is possible that it is a legend about the establishment of the Christian congregation at Pella, which existed primarily of non-Jews, trying to anchor it in the Jewish congregation of Jerusalem. Perhaps the congregation of Pella counted among its members a few coming from Jerusalem, and the desire existed to exploit this fact. A legend such as this was logical, seeing as how Pella in the meantime had become the cradle of two Jewish-Christian sects, the Nazarenes and the Ebionites. On the other hand, the Christian congregation of Pella had brought forth an important person, namely Aristo of Pella. He lived in the first half of the second century. Aristo was the author of an apologetic writing against the Jews.

However, the Christian congregation of Pella did not play an important role in church history. Pella, after the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple, did not grow into a missionary center, comparable to Jamnia in the case of the Jews. There was no rivalry at all between Pella and Jerusalem. There was therefore not a single motive for such a legend arising. And Eusebius's reference to Flavius Josephus (*Hist. eccl.* 3.5.4: "Those who wish can retrace accurately from the history written by Josephus . . .") makes it improbable that he based his idea about the fate of the Jerusalem congregation on legendary material.

2. As has been said, Eusebius wants to communicate a message. He does not describe in detail what happened on the flight of the Christians to Pella; he does not specify any concrete circumstances surrounding the trip; he says nothing about the difficulties which went along with it; he limits himself exclusively to the schematic pattern of flight-rescue-destruction. No leader of the congregation is named. The only concrete name that Eusebius mentions is the name of a place, the city Pella. But Pella is not mentioned again in the *Ecclesiastical History*.

Eusebius has thus made up this name to give his story the appearance of believability. Transjordan was a traditional place of escape.¹² By the means of the name Pella, Eusebius refers simply to a known city in an area which everyone knew to be outside of Palestine: a safe place of refuge for the Christian congregation of Jerusalem.¹³

Here a methodological mistake is made. When a historian wants to communicate a message, this need not mean that he has created the data he needs. There is in fact a kind of tension in Eusebius's story, because he mentions the *departure* for Pella, but later he does not mention a *return*, whereas we get the distinct impression that a Christian congregation existed in Jerusalem after A.D. 70. Eusebius mentions as well: "... the story goes that those of the Apostles and of the disciples of the Lord who were alive came together from every place. . . ."¹⁴ Seeing as how he is describing James's succession, it must have been in Jerusalem. The expression "from every place" (*pantachothen*) refers not only to the apostles, who went out into the whole world, but also to the disciples of our Lord, who had left for Pella.¹⁵ From every place implies Pella as well!

3. Pella (named after the birthplace of Alexander the Great) was a center of Hellenistic culture. Is it probable that people of Jewish descent would seek refuge in such pagan surroundings? Furthermore, Pella, along with other places in the Decapolis, was attacked by furious Jews in A.D. 66 as retribution for the enormous bloodbath which had been perpetrated against the Jews of Caesarea at the outbreak of the uprising. In this case the fleeing Christians would not have been the victims of the Romans, but of the embittered freedom-fighters. And if they came later, then they could not have counted on a friendly reception from the local population.¹⁶

In the information stemming from Josephus the name Pella is, however, only mentioned as one of the cities affected; Josephus does not mention whether inhabitants possibly retaliated against their Jewish fellow citizens. In the case of the cities Scythopolis and Gerasa he does mention such activity. In Scythopolis, where the Jews had joined the other inhabitants in resisting plunderers, they were treacherously butchered. But the inhabitants of Gerasa left in peace the Jews who wanted to keep on living in the city, and even gave those who wanted to leave safe-conduct to the border (*J.W.* 2.457-80). In neither city was there any question of total destruction.

¹² Pella was situated in a place of abundant water and thus well-suited for habitation in the Decapolis, which already in ancient times was known for its hot springs (Plinius, *Natural History* 5.16.74: "aquis divitem"). See further H. Bietenhard, "Die syrische Dekapolis von Pompeius bis Traian. Ein Kapitel aus der neutestamentliche Zeitgeschichte," in *ANRW* II.8 (ed. H. Temporini; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977), 220-61.

¹³ Verheyden, *Vlucht*, 237-40.

¹⁴ *Hist. eccl.* 3.11.

¹⁵ This point is disputed by Verheyden (*Vlucht*, 60-61) with the assertion that Eusebius must be referring to the commission to the apostles to go out into the world. In itself this is true, at least as far as the apostles are concerned. But Eusebius mentions at the same time other groups too: the disciples of our Lord and his relatives, that is, among others, the congregation of Jerusalem about which he had written that she had fled to Pella (*Hist. eccl.* 3.5.2, 3 is written as one unit: see note 28).

¹⁶ Mulder, *Verwoesting*, 85-86.

Furthermore, it was not strange that some Jews sought help from pagans. Under the merciless regime of governor Gessius Florus (A.D. 64–66), many Jews felt forced to leave their homes and seek refuge elsewhere. They were convinced that, in any case, it was better to go and live elsewhere (*Ant.* 20.252-56; cp. *J.W.* 2.279). The fastest way to elude the governor was to go to the Decapolis (Ten City Alliance), a free federation of ten cities. We discover here a certain analogy with the flight of the Christians to Pella. For the Christians in Jerusalem, there was probably an extra consideration. In the Decapolis various Christian congregations had arisen which could take up and defend the refugees from the capital city. It was clear that Jesus had healed a possessed man in this area, and this man had subsequently spread the news everywhere about his healing (Mark 5:1-20; see 7:31-37). It is therefore quite possible that Christians from a non-Jewish background lived in Pella, one of the ten cities.¹⁷ They looked for help, it is true, in a Hellenistic city, however not from pagans, but from a congregation of fellow Christians. The gospel of the Messiah had the power to unite circumcised and uncircumcised, through their common faith.

4. The departure of the Christians to Pella would have been mentioned in other sources. As it is, this supposed flight is contradicted by several "competitive traditions" which make it seem as if there always had been a church in Jerusalem.¹⁸ In this way Eusebius, on the authority of various writers, gives a list of the names of 15 bishops, from the Hebrews in Jerusalem from the apostolic time to the campaign of Hadrian against the Jews. This suggests a certain continuity without a break.¹⁹ This is also true of his statement: "There was also a very big church of Christ in Jerusalem, composed of Jews, until the siege under Hadrian."²⁰ But the fact that these statements occur in the same book proves already that they are not so "competitive" as is suggested. Apparently Eusebius himself did not regard them as incompatible.²¹

Epiphanius mentions that gatherings were held in Jerusalem in the same house where the disciples had been together between Jesus' ascension and Pentecost; this house was namely not destroyed, just as various other blocks of houses at the hill of Sion and seven synagogues were not.²² In Eusebius's list of bishops

¹⁷ S. Sowers, "The Circumstances and Recollection of the Pella Flight," *TZ* 26 (1970): 305-20, esp. 309-10; R. A. Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity: From the End of the New Testament Period Until Its Disappearance in the Fourth Century* (Jerusalem: Magness Press, 1988), 125-26. See about early Christianity in Transjordan: B. van Elderen, "Early Christianity in Transjordan," *TynBul* 45, no. 1 (1994): 97-117.

¹⁸ G. Lüdemann, *Paulus der Heidenapostel. Band 2: Antipaulismus in frühen Christentum* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 278-79.

¹⁹ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.5.2.

²⁰ Eusebius, *Proof of the Gospel* 3.5.

²¹ Verheyden, "Flight," 382.

²² Epiphanius, *Weights and Measures*, 14. See B. C. Gray, "The Movements of the Jerusalem Church During the First Jewish War," *JEH* 24 (1973): 1-7; Koester, "Origin and Significance," 96-97. According to Pixner, the Jewish Christians who returned had built an "apostolic synagogue" on the foundations of this house, including the use of enormous stones which probably came from the destroyed temple complex (B. Pixner, *Weg des Messias und Stätten der Urkirche* [ed. Rainer Riesner; Giessen: Brunnen Verlag, 1991], 287-326).

the continuity of the congregation is similarly emphasized; James was the first, and Simeon the second bishop of Jerusalem. But Eusebius tells about Simeon that he was appointed after 70, when people had returned "from every place"; this happened about ten years after the death of James. There was thus indeed, clearly, a break, but not one regarding principles. Someone was chosen of those who were living relatives of the Lord. Jewish parentage and family relations with the Savior apparently still defined the line of succession.

In the case of neither Eusebius nor Epiphanius does it appear that one or more of the apostles belonged to the group of refugees. Directions from heaven were addressed to those who were highly regarded (*dokimoi*) in the congregation itself. It was "the church people of Jerusalem" (according to Eusebius) who at a certain moment left the city; "the disciples of the apostles" (according to Epiphanius), thus not the apostles themselves, came back later.²³ Epiphanius mentions explicitly that they returned to Jerusalem and stayed there. With hindsight, the departure of the Christians to Pella was not more than a temporary stay. That is why the city of Pella did not obtain any special significance as a missionary center.

5. The distance to Pella is at least three days' travel in a northeasterly direction. But the Roman legions, under general Vespasian's leadership, approached just from that direction. They had all roads under their control, from Emmaus, to the northwest of Jerusalem, to Jericho, to the northeast of the city. In order to reach Pella, the refugees would have had to clear a path directly through the territory that Vespasian and his troops had subdued. In other words: it was no longer possible to flee. Brandon attaches great weight to this line of argumentation; Mulder regards this as correct.²⁴

Josephus, however, mentions repeatedly that the Jews left a besieged Jerusalem, in spite of stringent control of the ways of escape.²⁵ From this it is clear that in every phase of the war there were indeed possibilities of escape. Sometimes it was even possible through bribery to provide a safe escape route for large groups of people. Furthermore, deserters were in general treated well by the Romans.

The departure of the Christians out of Jerusalem to Pella is difficult to date precisely. Eight years passed between the death of James and the capture of Jerusalem. Some think of an emigration of the congregation taking place just after James's death in A.D. 62 (Wehnert) and others of a date just before the beginning of war activity in A.D. 66 (Simon), but these are too facile solutions; Epiphanius speaks about a city which is threatened by a siege, captured, and destroyed. A possible dating for the departure could be the cessation of fighting in the winter of A.D. 66-67, when the Roman army was driven from Jerusalem. Right after this many prominent Jews left the city, according to Josephus, as

²³ The Christians whom Aquila met in Jerusalem were called by Epiphanius, "disciples of the disciples of the apostles." They were, as it were, the grandchildren of the mother-church under James. The previous generation had returned to Jerusalem from Pella.

²⁴ Mulder, *Vervorsting*, 83.

²⁵ Josephus, *J.H.*: 2.538; 4.378-79; 4.410; 5.420-23; 6.111-20; 6.229-31, *ibid.* 20.256.

those threatened by drowning leave a sinking ship (*J.H.* 2.555-56). Among these refugees there could have been Jewish Christians.

According to Josephus, the first war activity took place in the summer of the year A.D. 66 (*J.H.* 2.284). In November of that same year the Jews scored an important victory over the Twelfth Legion under the command of Cestius Gallius, the governor of Syria, who had entered Jerusalem. He had to sound the retreat and his army was destroyed at Bet-Choron. It was only in the spring of 67 that the new general in command of the Romans, Vespasian, regarded it time to resume the war. But it would take until the end of 68 before Galilee and Perea were conquered. And, in spite of the fact that all avenues of escape were from that moment on closely guarded, it was clearly still possible, by bribery, to escape Jerusalem and in that way obtain precious freedom through money (*J.H.* 4.377-79). It is true, it was necessary to wait for a period in which there was little rainfall, because otherwise it was too dangerous to cross the Jordan river (see *J.H.* 4.433).

The chief arguments against the Pella-tradition appear, after close examination, not to be conclusive. There is no question of a legend of origin, because the church of Pella did not play an important or competitive role in later church history. If Eusebius is using the story to show that the righteous are delivered and the godless are judged, this does not mean that he himself has fabricated the Pella-tradition. Pella lay in the Jordan valley, just across the border with Perea, in the area of the Decapolis, where at an early period Christian congregations could have come into existence. At no phase in the siege of Jerusalem was escape impossible; in particular the winter of 66-67 would have offered sufficient space to leave, on the condition of favorable weather circumstances. However, no apostles were found among the refugees. That is why there is so little known about these events. After the return of the congregation to Jerusalem, a successor to James as superintendent (bishop) was appointed from living relatives of the Lord, by which the leadership of the congregation was assured.

III. *The Believability of Eusebius*

A striking detail in Eusebius's account supports the idea that the Pella-tradition was not his own creation. It is namely quite remarkable that he describes the departure from Jewish territory as going to "a city in Perea, called Pella." Was Pella a city in Perea? Not during the New Testament period. Perea was traditionally reckoned as belonging to one of the four regions of Israel (Judea, Galilee, Samaria, Perea), while Josephus mentions Pella to indicate the northern border of Perea, which belonged to the more or less independent area of the Decapolis (*J.H.* 3.46-47). That alliance of ten cities was past history when Eusebius wrote his book. For him and his readers, Perea was simply identical with Transjordan. Indicating Pella as a city in Perea is therefore an anachronism. But thereby a strange element in the story emerges: how can a Christian congregation of Jerusalem leave Jewish territory to go to a city in Perea, that is, a place still within the danger zone?

Eusebius could have known from his acquaintance with Josephus that Perea was indeed directly involved in the war activities (J.W. 4.410-39). Not only that, in the paragraph which follows in his book he cites Josephus concerning a Jewish woman who, as a consequence of the war, had left Perea and sought refuge in Jerusalem, but, desperate with hunger, was driven to the decision to eat her own son.²⁶ In the light of these facts it is not probable that Eusebius would, on his own, have made up a city in Perea as a place of refuge for Christians from Jerusalem. Everything speaks to the contrary. If Eusebius nevertheless describes the congregation of Jerusalem going to this city to find a safe haven, then he must have been aware, from tradition, of the name Pella.²⁷ Furthermore, it is not true that Eusebius connects the departure of the congregation directly with the judgment of Jerusalem. He distinguishes clearly between the Jerusalem congregation, on the one hand, and "the holy men" (*hoi hagioi andres*), on the other, whereby not the Christians in general are meant, but rather the prominent representatives of the Christian church.²⁸ Concretely this refers to James in Jerusalem, but also to all the apostles who went out into the world to proclaim the gospel (men such as Peter and Paul). Such holy men were honored for their piety, Eusebius writes later.²⁹

With the disappearance of the Christians from Jerusalem, divine protection also disappeared. That is the Biblical motive by which a small group of righteous ones is seen, by their presence in the city, to hold back divine judgment, because God Almighty wants to bless not only them, but also their surroundings. Think, for example, of the righteous in Sodom (Gen 18:22-33). Further in his account, Eusebius writes explicitly in this fashion when he says: as long as James and the others stayed in Jerusalem, they were able to maintain a strong defense and protection of that place.³⁰ But one after another they had to leave the city. Thus it is not the departure as such, which is Eusebius's point, but the disappearance of the Christian presence in Jerusalem. We can attempt to describe his intention in the following way: As a result of Stephen's being stoned, the murder of James the apostle, and of the other James, the brother of the Lord, all "holy men" were

²⁶ *Hist. eccl.* 3.6.21-28; citation taken from Josephus, *J.W.* 6.201-13.

²⁷ See J. Wehnert, "Die Auswanderung der Jerusalemer Christen nach Pella – historisches Faktum oder theologische Konstruktion? Kritische Bemerkungen zu einem neuen Buch," *Zeitschrift für die Kirchengeschichte* 102 (1991): 231-55, esp. 239-40.

²⁸ The Greek text of the *Hist. eccl.* 3.5.2-3 forms one long sentence, in which Eusebius describes how the Jews, after the ascension of the Savior, plotted with all kinds of sinister schemes against his followers. Three of them were killed: Stephen, then James the brother of John, and last but not least James of Jerusalem. Further, the other apostles were opposed by all kinds of means, but they left the country (Judea here refers not to the region but to the entire Jewish territory) in order to proclaim the gospel to all nations. After describing how the apostles left, Eusebius then describes the departure of the Jerusalem congregation.

²⁹ *Hist. eccl.* 7.19. See also *Hist. eccl.* 3.1.3: " . . . the holy Apostles and disciples of our Saviour were scattered throughout the whole world." In close connection with this Eusebius specifies the names of Thomas, Andrew, Peter, and Paul.

³⁰ *Hist. eccl.* 3.7.8.

absent from Jerusalem, and, when the Christian congregation left as war came closer, there was nothing to prevent divine judgment taking place.³¹ Hereby we note that Eusebius has chosen his words carefully. He does not speak without nuances about the Jewish people as a whole. God's punishment came down, finally, because of the criminal acts committed against Christ and his apostles, causing that generation (*tēn genean autēn ekeinēn*) to disappear totally from the world of men, that is, the generation of Jews who deliberately remained opposed to Christ and his apostles. By using this formula Eusebius is connecting his account with the words of Jesus himself, who repeatedly lamented about his contemporaries, calling them an unbelieving and evil generation.

The assertion that Eusebius, with regard to the Pella tradition, is letting himself be influenced by Luke 21:21 lacks sufficient foundation. What did Jesus say exactly? "Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains." He did not speak about people in Jerusalem, but in Judea. And he advised no group departure to a city such as Pella, but to a scattering on "the mountains," which in this context must refer to the Judean hill-country and not to Transjordan or to the area around the Dead Sea.³² Judas Maccabaeus, with his followers, had also sought refuge in the rugged hills of Judea in earlier times. At no point in Jesus' eschatological speech do we find the command to leave Judea.

In times of war people normally look for protection and safety within the walls of a strong city. But this city is described as doomed for destruction. Jesus' words mean that the besieged city of Jerusalem will not be a place of safe refuge. Whoever works within the walls ought better to flee, and whoever is working in the fields should not enter it again.³³ The formula has the form of an indirect warning. Jesus in v. 21 is no longer addressing his disciples directly, but he is speaking now about the dangerous situation for all inhabitants of Judea. It was thus not Jesus' intention to call for a flight of the Christian congregation. It could well be that some Christians in Judea interpreted his words in this way, but the Gospel of Luke does not mention whether or not this warning in fact resulted in a mass departure. This makes more difficult the opinion that Luke 21:21 must be read as a prophecy which has been put in Jesus' mouth after the fact by the evangelist. In that case, Luke ought to have been more specific.³⁴ The warning is expressed in general terms. Verse 22 means, then, that the

³¹ Wehnert, "Auswanderung," 236.

³² Contra I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978), 772; and Sowers, "Circumstances," 319. See also Luke 1:39, 65. Pixner sees Jesus' eschatological speech as the most important reason for the flight to Pella; according to him the Christians left Jerusalem because they expected, on the basis of that speech, a speedy return of the Messiah in a desert area (Pixner, *Wége des Messias*, 360-62).

³³ Jesus speaks of the situation during a visible siege (Luke 21:20: "When you see Jerusalem surrounded [*kukloumenēn*] by armies"), while Eusebius says that the Christian congregation "before the war" (*pro tou poleμου*) received advice from heaven to get out of Jerusalem, thus in any case before the city was totally encircled by the Romans.

³⁴ B. Reicke, "Synoptic Prophecies on the Destruction of Jerusalem," in *Studies in New Testament and Early Christian Literature. Essays in Honor of Allen P. Wikgren* (ed. D. E. Aune; Leiden: Brill, 1972), 121-34, esp. 124-30.

announcement of disaster will be fulfilled which already was written in the book of the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 21:8-10).

Eusebius has thus not borrowed his information from Luke. All three verbs used in the Gospel ("flee," "get out," "not enter") are missing in Eusebius. Verheyden is mistaken when he identifies the divine command to depart for Pella in Eusebius with Luke 21:21.³⁵ It is striking that Eusebius, at a later point, does indeed refer to the warnings of Jesus Christ (he gives a very ample list of citations), but leaves out just this very text.³⁶ Eusebius regarded Jesus' words as a general warning for the *people in Judea*, while later he describes a specific message given to the *congregation in Jerusalem*. The fact that he carefully distinguishes these "flight traditions" from each other is support for rejecting the view that the departure for Pella was Eusebius's own creation. Instead, it seems evident that he had historical information at his disposal, including the detail that the people left due to the advice of leaders of the congregation, who had received a divine oracle through revelation.³⁷

The Pella-tradition in Epiphanius's writings is indeed very similar to that in the case of Eusebius. Here also we read of a miraculous escape from Jerusalem, a safe stay in the city of Pella, followed by the destruction of Jerusalem. Nevertheless, an analysis of the texts used does not demonstrate that Epiphanius is literarily dependent upon Eusebius. This is even clearer when we note that he mentions up to three times that which in Eusebius's writings is limited to one single fragment.³⁸ Furthermore, Eusebius's formula is rather vague: he speaks of a certain divine oracle (*tina chrēsmon*) by means of a revelation (*di' apokalypseos*). Epiphanius, in contrast, mentions a command of Christ which was communicated by an angel. Only in the case of Eusebius does the name Pella belong to the divine oracle itself. But, while Epiphanius in two of the three cases situates the Christians who fled in Perea (that is, in Transjordan), in all three cases he says, historically correctly, that the city of Pella was located in the Decapolis. This while that fact was definitely not to be derived from Eusebius! Epiphanius knew the Pella-tradition from an unknown source, which was not dependent upon Eusebius.³⁹

³⁵ Verheyden, *Vlucht*, 236-37.

³⁶ Eusebius quotes in succession the following prophetic words of Christ: Matt 24:19-21; Luke 19:42-44a; Luke 21:23b-25; Luke 21:20 (*Hist. eccl.* 3.7).

³⁷ V. Balabanski, *Eschatology in the Making: Mark, Matthew and the Didache* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 105-9. Eusebius means with the Greek word divine oracle (*chrēsmon*) a concrete prophecy from the Bible, which usually is literally quoted by him (see Verheyden, *Vlucht*, 172-73). This is not so in this case, which involves a reference to direct revelation (*apokalypsis*) given to prominent members of the congregation. According to Epiphanius, it was given through an angel of the Lord. A Biblical parallel is the divine oracle which Cornelius received from an angel (Acts 10:22), or the repeated warnings to flee in a dream given to the magi from the East and to Joseph, which similarly are called divine oracles (Matt 2:12, 22).

³⁸ See further Koester, "Origin and Significance," 92-97.

³⁹ While Eusebius wants to explain the name Ebionites with help from the etymology of the Hebrew word for "poor," Epiphanius offers another explanation: according to him, the Ebionites were rooted in Perea/Pella, and the name referred to a certain person who had established the sect.

The source that Eusebius used was probably no one less than the person we mentioned earlier, the apologete Aristo of Pella.⁴⁰ He wrote a dialogue between Jason (a Messianic Jew) and Papiscus (a Jew from Alexandria). Sadly, this work of Aristo's has been lost. It is clear from a quote that Eusebius uses in describing the Bar-Kochba uprising (A.D. 132–135), which indicates that Aristo must have been an important source of information for Eusebius:

Hadrian then commanded that by a legal decree and ordinances the whole nation should be absolutely prevented from entering from thenceforth even the district round Jerusalem, so that not even from a distance could it see its ancestral home. Ariston of Pella tells the story. (*Hist. eccl.* 4.6.3)

When Aristo told something about the uprising under Bar-Kochba, he must have undoubtedly used the sad ending of the story to support his anti-Jewish argumentation. Along these lines, he would have shown the parallel with the (first) Jewish war, during which, on the one hand, the Christians fled to Pella, whereas, on the other hand, soon thereafter disaster struck the Jews remaining in Jerusalem. It is not improbable that Aristo, in this connection, had passed along information about the presence of Christians in Pella, with the extra reason that he himself came from the city of Pella and was of Jewish parentage.⁴¹ Indirectly then, Eusebius is basing his story on the witness of the Christians who fled out of Jerusalem. The Pella-tradition comes from a reliable source.

IV. *The Return of the Congregation*

Eusebius has more to tell about the period after the death of James and the fall of Jerusalem:⁴²

Epibion. In the light of this difference it is plausible that Epiphanius had access to another source than Eusebius (Balabanski, *Eschatology*, 109-12).

⁴⁰ A. Schlatter, *Synagoge und Kirche bis zum Bar Kochba-Aufstand. Vier Studien zur Geschichte des Rabbinats und der jüdischen Christenheit in den ersten zwei Jahrhunderten* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1966), 154; Lüdemann, *Paulus*, 274; Wehnert, "Auswanderung," 254.

⁴¹ Verheyden (*Vlucht*, 54) suggests that the only thing that Aristo had in common with the Pella-tradition was the name of the city, but this does not do justice to the coherence of the tradition (Wehnert, "Auswanderung," 254). Although Wagemakers regards the information in Eusebius about the flight to Pella as unhistorical, he believes that there is a kernel of truth in it. He suggests that Aristo, in the framework of his apologetic, has passed along a local tradition. A few Christians had individually escaped from a besieged Jerusalem and wound up in Pella. Later, this originally local tradition was, according to him, blown up into a migration of the *entire* church of Jerusalem (B. Wagemakers, "De vlucht naar Pella. Een oude discussie en een nieuwe suggestie," *NedTT* 56 [2002]: 89-98). But why should this "new suggestion" of Wagemakers's be more believable than the old information which Eusebius has preserved?

⁴² In the Greek these two facts are coupled to each other as chronologically preceding that which Eusebius wants to tell about the appointment of Simeon. In the tenth century the tradition is recorded that the Jewish Christians returned to an abandoned Jerusalem from Transjordan in the fourth year of emperor Vespasian, that is A.D. 73, and built a church there (Eutychius, *Annals*, in Migne, P.G. 111.985). See about the history of the building of this "apostolic synagogue" on the hill of Zion: Pixner, *Weg des Messias*, 287-326.

After the martyrdom of James and the capture of Jerusalem which immediately followed, the story goes that those of the Apostles and of the disciples of the Lord who were still alive came together from every place with those who were, humanly speaking, of the family of the Lord, for many of them were then still alive, and they all took counsel together as to whom they ought to adjudge worthy to succeed James, and all unanimously decided that Simeon the son of Clopas, whom the scripture of the Gospel also mentions, was worthy of the throne of the diocese there. He was, so it is said, a cousin of the Saviour, for Hegesippus relates that Clopas was the brother of Joseph. (*Hist. eccl.* 3.11)

This passage is very important for our subject.⁴³ The story does not end with a departure from Jerusalem for Pella. Although some Jewish Christians were left behind in Pella (is it not true that Aristo came from there and that the Nazarenes and the Ebionites had their origin there?), after the war there took place a return of the refugee-congregation as a whole to the city of Jerusalem. Epiphanius mentioned this fact explicitly in order to explain why Aquila encountered a thriving faith at the beginning of the second century in a Jerusalem which had been severely decimated: people had returned to Jerusalem from Pella. Eusebius does not say this in so many words, but he does so implicitly: the apostles and the followers of the Lord came together "from everywhere" for a kind of ecumenical consultation in Jerusalem.⁴⁴ From Transjordan also! And seeing as how there consequently a joint consultation takes place with a unanimous conclusion, which at the meeting led to the appointment of a new superintendent for Jerusalem, a congregation must have been present there.

Thus did the rather disoriented mother-church make a new start after the war by appointing Simeon as the official successor of James, the brother of the Lord. The presence of so many prominent people at this occasion points to the fact that the question of the successor in Jerusalem was regarded as having more than local significance. A member of Jesus' family was consciously chosen: a full cousin, whose father was furthermore, according to the Gospel of Luke, one of the two travellers to Emmaus, who had thus personally met the risen Lord and even had been his host at his own home (Luke 24:18; see John 19:25).

As a relative of James, who had been murdered, Simeon certainly belonged to those who similarly had to fear for their lives, but at the same time he was one of the prominent persons in the congregation of Jerusalem who, according to Eusebius, "before the war" had received by a revelation a divine oracle to go to Pella. That means that Simeon too was part of the group of refugees who had

⁴³ R. J. Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 84-85, argues with good arguments that the entire passage contains historically plausible information which has been borrowed by Eusebius from someone who is mentioned by name: Hegesippus. He was a Jewish Christian from the second century. The essence of this passage, namely that James was succeeded by Simeon, a cousin of the Lord, exists in a fragment of Hegesippus which Eusebius will quote literally (*Hist. eccl.* 4.22.4).

⁴⁴ Thus not in Pella, for a new superintendent for Jerusalem had to be appointed (contra J. J. Gunther, "The Fate of the Jerusalem Church. The Flight to Pella," *TJ* 29 [1973]: 81-94, esp. 91).

returned to Jerusalem. He died a martyr's death during the reign of the emperor Trajan (A.D. 98–117), because, due to his descent from David, he was regarded as politically dangerous.⁴⁵ This means in any case that Simeon was still leading the Jewish-Christian congregation of Jerusalem around the turn of the second century A.D. He must have then been functioning as superintendent of the mother-church at Jerusalem and was thereby one of the most influential Jewish Christians.⁴⁶

The thesis that the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple caused Jewish Christianity to disappear permanently is, this we may finally affirm, contestable. It is clear that the Messianic Jews consciously did not identify themselves with the Jewish cause in the war against the Romans, the occupying power.⁴⁷ There was no panic reaction at all during the flight to Pella. The leaders of the Jerusalem congregation were warned in time by a divine oracle that they had received. As a result, people could still leave "before the war." It was no mass migration, but we could call it a church migration. By leaving for Pella in the Decapolis, the congregation of Jerusalem survived the catastrophic year 70, physically and spiritually, so that it was later possible to regroup in relative tranquillity. Besides being able to begin again in the capital city, Jewish Christianity was vital enough to be able to establish itself elsewhere in the country (particularly in Galilee, a region where various relatives of Jesus lived and worked).

Eusebius mentions in addition the following about the superintendents in Jerusalem:

I have not found any written statement of the dates of the bishops in Jerusalem, for tradition says that they were extremely short-lived, but I have gathered from documents this much—that up to the siege of the Jews by Hadrian the successions of bishops were fifteen in number. It is said that they were all Hebrews by origin who had nobly accepted the knowledge of Christ, so that they were counted worthy even of the episcopal ministry by those who had the power to judge such questions. For their whole church at that time consisted of Hebrews who had continued Christian faith from the Apostles down to the siege at the time when the Jews again rebelled from the Romans and were beaten in a great war. Since the Jewish bishops then ceased, it is now necessary to give their names from the beginning. The first then was James who was called the Lord's brother, and after him Simeon was the second. The third was Justus, Zacchaeus was the fourth, Tobias the fifth, the sixth Benjamin, the seventh John, the eighth Matthias, the ninth Philip, the tenth Seneca, the eleventh Justus, the twelfth Levi, the thirteenth Efras, the

⁴⁵ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.32.

⁴⁶ "The prominent ones (*dokimoi*) there," as receivers of the divine oracle, is a non-official title. It is clear that, after the death of James, no official successor had been appointed who, in his place, could have taken over the leadership of the congregation. There were, certainly, a number of prominent Christians in Jerusalem. The Greek word *dokimos* is used in the New Testament for those of the congregation who were broadly respected; they had stood the test and had been shown to be trustworthy (Rom 14:18; 1 Cor 11:1; 2 Cor 10:18, 13:7; 2 Tim 2:15; Jas 1:12).

⁴⁷ G. P. Luttikhuisen, "Vroeg-christelijk jodendom," in *Jodendom en vroeg christendom: continuïteit en discontinuïteit* (ed. T. Baarda e.a., Kampen: Kok, 1991), 163–89, esp. 173.

fourteenth Joseph, and last of all the fifteenth Judas. Such were the bishops in the city of Jerusalem, from the Apostles down to the time mentioned, and they were all Jews. (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.5.1-4)⁴⁸

The large number of superintendents ("bishops": *episkopoi*), fifteen, for a period of about 70 years was explained, according to tradition, by the fact that these men lived only a short time.⁴⁹ This explanation is, however, not convincing. Simeon, notably, was very old when he died.⁵⁰ There are those who have assumed that other superintendents from other Jewish-Christian congregations in the area, and even from Pella, are also counted in this list.⁵¹ It is more plausible, however, that they did not give leadership to the congregation in Jerusalem *after* each other chronologically, but *next* to each other. If we may regard the third person on the list, Simeon's successor Justus,⁵² as the last superintendent before Hadrian's campaign against the Jews, there remain exactly twelve other names of prominent Jewish Christians—perhaps they formed a body of elders which, together with James, gave leadership to the congregation of Jerusalem.⁵³

Whatever may be the case, the superintendents of Jerusalem were all initially of Jewish descent, until the uprising under Bar Kochba. Thereafter, emperor Hadrian declared Jerusalem to be forbidden territory. We heard of this already via Aristo of Pella. For Jews to enter the city there was even the death penalty. So Jerusalem, under the name Aelia Capitolina, became a completely pagan city. Hereby the character of the Christian congregation was to change. Justus was the last superintendent of Jewish descent. From this time on the superintendents were all of non-Jewish descent, according to Eusebius.⁵⁴ He then lists again fifteen⁵⁵ names, but, as he himself says, these are borrowed from the list of superintendents of the congregation. Mark was the first non-Jewish superintendent, Narcissus is named as the fifteenth; but starting to count with the apostles, he is, according to Eusebius, number thirty in the line of succession. Here there appears something of the continuity as well as the discontinuity in the apostolic church of Jerusalem. Superintendents replace each other, but from A.D. 125 they no longer are stemming from "the circumcision."

⁴⁸ Epiphanius also provides us with such a list (*Medicine Chest* 66.21-22), but he mistakenly calls Justus Judas (see about this: Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, 77-79).

⁴⁹ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.5.1.

⁵⁰ According to Hegesippus, Simeon died a martyr's death at the age of 120 (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 3.32.3, 6).

⁵¹ R. van den Broek, "Der Brief des Jakobus an Quadratus und das Problem der jüdenchristliche Bischöfe von Jerusalem," in *Text and Testimony* (ed. T. Baarda e.a.; Kampen: Kok, 1988), 56-65, gives a summarized overview of the most important explanations.

⁵² Was he the same person called Justus or Joseph Barsabbas in Acts 1:23?

⁵³ Some suppose that, when the number of the Twelve had become too small, a body of twelve elders was formed around the person of James, with the intention of taking over the leading position of the apostles (Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, 70-79, where he refers to van den Broek, "Der Brief des Jakobus," 64-65). The book of Acts speaks repeatedly about authoritative elders (eye witnesses) in Jerusalem. See on this J. van Bruggen, *Ambten in de apostolische kerk. Een exegetisch mozaïek* (Kampen: Kok, 1984), 78-91

⁵⁴ *Hist. eccl.* 5.12.

⁵⁵ Remarkably enough, by a careful count only thirteen superintendents are named. Two names can be added from Eusebius's *Chronicle* after Capito: Maximus and Antonius (Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus*, 71 n. 79).

At the beginning of the second century, the authority of the mother-church in Jerusalem becomes less as a result of relatives, apostles, or eyewitnesses leaving or passing away. Slowly but surely their personal presence was replaced by apostolic writings.⁵⁶ Gradually the number of Jewish Christians, including from within Israel, would be surpassed by the number of Christians of non-Jewish descent. Christianity seemed to have outgrown its Jewish roots. Nothing, however, is further from the truth. Let us never forget the stirring history of the Jewish Christians. The congregation of Jerusalem is and will remain our mother-church.

V. Perspectives

In conclusion we may list some perspectives that have been opened by this investigation:

1. Our mother-church, the Christian congregation of Jerusalem, was, under instruction from heaven, itself preserved from the violence of war and destruction. Although the city of Jerusalem was besieged and captured, and her proud temple laid waste, the Jewish Christians were able to find safety in time for themselves by leaving for Pella in the Decapolis. Thereby the congregation of Jerusalem survived the catastrophe which hit the Jewish people around the year A.D. 70. The apostolic period was not yet ended.

2. There is no concrete evidence that the Jewish Christians took an active part in the war against the Romans. Followers of Jesus are certainly not zealots. It is possible that the following factors played a role: the prophetic words of Jesus Christ about the lamentable fate of Jerusalem and her temple, the growing distance between Messianic and other Jews (especially after the murder of James), and the respect for the government which was common in Christian circles.

3. The departure of the Jewish Christians was not intended as a fundamental break with Judaism. The flight from Jerusalem to Pella was, it is clear, followed by a return from Pella to Jerusalem. There is continuity in the church history of Jerusalem. The post-war congregation was none other than our mother-church of Pentecost. About ten years after the death of James, the line of succession was carried on by appointing Simeon. So did the Christian congregation continue to bear a Jewish character.

4. A few of those who remained in Pella developed into Jewish-Christian groupings such as the Nazarenes and the Ebionites. In these circles, a modified version of the Gospel of Matthew was in circulation under the name "The Gospel of the Hebrews."⁵⁷ Matthew had originally written the Gospel for Israel in

⁵⁶ Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, 124.

⁵⁷ Probably the Nazarenes formed an orthodox Jewish-Christian grouping, from which the sectarian Ebionites (who denied, among other things, the virgin birth of Jesus) broke off as a splinter-group. Next to the holy Scriptures they read at least one Christian Gospel: Matthew or a modified version of it. This "Gospel of the Hebrews" (also well known as the Gospel of the Nazarenes or of the Ebionites) was written in Hebrew square script and was regarded by some of its users as the authentic Gospel of Matthew. The document itself has not been preserved, although a few fragments exist in Greek translation. See J. van Bruggen, *Christ on Earth: The Gospel Narratives as History* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 47-52; and Pritz, *Nazarene Jewish Christianity*, 83-94. For a possible connection between the Nazarenes (Jewish Christians) and the Nazoreans (Christian Jews) from Acts 24:5, see M. C. de Boer, "The Nazoreans: Living at the Boundary of Judaism and Christianity," in

his mother language.⁵⁸ Presumably the Jewish Christians took the Hebrew original of Matthew from Jerusalem, and it was then in Pella and the surrounding area of the Decapolis that for the first time the need was felt to translate the Gospel for Israel into Greek.

5. We came across the designation "Hebrews" in Eusebius as a description of Jewish Christians. Until A.D. 135 both the superintendents and the congregation under their supervision were all "Hebrews," that is, descending from the circumcision.⁵⁹ We notice that the New Testament contains a letter with the rather enigmatic address: "to the Hebrews" (*pros Hebraious*), which can be situated in the sixties of the first century.⁶⁰ To understand this letter to the Hebrews it could be important to know the historical context of the congregation of Jerusalem during the period we have been discussing.⁶¹

This investigation has shown that the departure of the congregation from Jerusalem to Pella in the Decapolis does not only belong to historical factuality, but also has historical significance. It was not a one-way ticket, but as it were a return-ticket, taken not to leave the past behind, but to enter the future. The departure of the Jewish Christians to Pella is in more than one sense a *fleeing forward*.

VI. Appendix: *The Pseudo-Clementines*

Koester gives much attention, in relation to the Pella-tradition, to the Pseudo-Clementine literature, a fictive autobiography of Clement of Rome.⁶² The

Tolerance and Intolerance in Early Judaism and Christianity (ed. G. N. Stanton and G. G. Stroumsa; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 239-62.

⁵⁸ According to Irenaeus, Matthew produced his Gospel for the Hebrews in their own language (in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5.8.2). And Eusebius says that the apostle Matthew wrote down his Gospel in his mother language, before he went to the nations, as a kind of compensation for his further absence among his own people (*Hist. eccl.* 3.24.6).

⁵⁹ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 4.5.2.

⁶⁰ From the content of the letter to the Hebrews we get the impression that the sacrificial services had not yet ceased (Heb 10:2a), although we also read of the current covenant having become obsolete and, for that reason, its disappearance being near (Heb 8:13). When we read that the readers must pay attention to how their leaders came to end their lives, this seems to refer to the violent death of men like James, the brother of the Lord. The letter to the Hebrews could then have been written in the time between the death of James (A.D. 62) and the destruction of the temple (A.D. 70).

⁶¹ Are, for example, the current "leaders" of the congregation (Heb 13:17, 24), none of whom is named, the same people meant by the "prominent persons," not further specified, who according to Eusebius gave leadership to the departure of the Jewish Christians to Pella? In its context, the well-known phrase "Here we do not have an enduring city" (Heb 13:14) refers to the city of Jerusalem, where Jesus had suffered outside the city gate (see P. H. R. van IJouwelingen, "Wij hebben hier geen blijvende stad," *De Reformatie* 79, no. 3 [forthcoming 2003]).

It is furthermore worth considering whether or not the (final) redaction of *The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, a complex writing from the second half of the first century A.D., which is reckoned with the Apostolic Fathers, might be located in Pella (cp. A. Adam, "Erwagungen zur Herkunft der Didache," in *Sprache und Dogma. Untersuchungen zu Grundproblemen der Kirchengeschichte* [ed. G. Ruhbach; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1969], 24-70, esp. 68-70).

⁶² Koester, "Origin and Significance," 97-103.

Greek original has been lost, but there are fragments that have been preserved in Latin and Syriac translations. The true author is probably a Jewish Christian from Judea, who lived about A.D. 200.

In this old Jewish-Christian text there occurs a passage which presents itself as the preaching of the apostle Peter about the coming of the true Prophet. The threatening war and the fall of Jerusalem are mentioned as outward signs of the end of Judaism. An allusion is made to the divine deliverance of those who believe in Jesus Christ as the true Prophet and who have been baptized in his name: they will remain unharmed in the war which threatens Jerusalem and will be gathered to a safe (or fortified) place of the land (*Recognitions* 1.37.2 and 1.39.3).

It is a point of discussion as to what degree this vague reference agrees with the Pella-tradition, as we encounter it in Eusebius and Epiphanius. Was Pella that gathering-place? Strecker believed so, because he regarded a small group of Jewish Christians from Pella to be the (legendary) source of information.⁶³ But this is to reason in a circular way. A place name is absent and it is not a case of a conscious flight out of the city of Jerusalem.

Verheyden does not believe this to be an allusion to the flight to Pella, because, according to him, the author is alluding to a deliverance by means of baptism. This is no deliverance from military or political destruction of the city, Verheyden argues, but a deliverance of a religious character.⁶⁴ His argumentation, based on the supposed superiority of the Latin translation, does, however, not sufficiently take into account the expression "safe (or fortified) place of the land" in the Syriac translation. That geographical notion must have an earthly basis, even if there is a reference to a heavenly reality (see Isa 26:1: "we have a strong city").

Nevertheless, it remains uncertain whether or not the city Pella in Transjordan is being thought of. The congregation of Jerusalem sought safety, let us remember, outside (Jewish) land, namely in the area of the Decapolis.

A reference to a city such as Jericho is also a serious possibility in order to understand the text: Jericho lies *within* (Jewish) land.⁶⁵ At the end of the fragment here being discussed there is mention made of the departure of the Christians from Jerusalem, early in the morning after the murderous assault on James. With about 5,000 men a journey was made, due to safety considerations, to the nearby city of Jericho in order to stay there for thirty days (*Recognitions* 1.71.2. 5). What happened after that month we are, sadly, not told in this tradition which is only fragmentarily preserved.

Wehnert, who rather wants to speak of an emigration as a result of the death of James, says that they could have reach the more northerly situated Pella by

⁶³ G. Strecker, *Das Judentum in den Pseudoklementinen* (2d ed., Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1958), 229-31, 253-54.

⁶⁴ Verheyden, *Vlucht*, 23-28.

⁶⁵ F. S. Jones, *An Ancient Jewish Christian Source on the History of Christianity: Pseudo-Clementine Recognitions 1.27-71* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 158.

going from Jericho, an important crossroads point, via the Jordan valley, without detours.⁶⁶ He omits to see, however, that the text mentions a completed period of a thirty days' stay in Jericho. Could not they have just as well travelled directly to Pella? Since this, according to this tradition, was apparently not the case, it seems much more plausible that the congregation returned to Jerusalem about a month later, when the situation was less dangerous.

Our conclusion has to be that the tradition of a deliverance of Christians from the war, as it appears in the Pseudo-Clementine literature, is not at all clearly formulated and therefore it offers us too few points of contact to be able to be coupled to the flight to Pella.

⁶⁶ Wehnert, "Auswanderung," 250.