

The Circumstances and Recollection of the Pella Flight

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The Circumstances and Recollection of the Pella Flight

The oldest Christian book now extant naming *Pella* as the city of refuge for the Jerusalem Church during the first Jewish-Roman war is Eusebius' "Ecclesiastical History". Writing about 325, Eusebius says:

But before the war, the people of the Church in Jerusalem were bidden in an oracle given by revelation to men worthy of it to depart from the city and to dwell in a city of Perea called Pella. To it those who believed in Christ migrated from Jerusalem. Once the holy men had completely left the royal capital of the Jews and all Judea, the justice of God at last overtook them, since they had committed such transgressions against Christ and his apostles. Divine justice completely blotted out that impious generation from among men (Eus. Hist. 3. 5. 3).

A few decades later, Epiphanius notes that the post-war Jerusalem Church included Jerusalemites who had returned from Pella once peace had been established:

For when the city was about to be conquered by the Romans, all the disciples were warned by an angel to leave the city, since it was about to be destroyed completely. Becoming migrants, they dwelt in Pella, the city mentioned above, beyond the Jordan, which is said to be of the Decapolis. After the destruction of Jerusalem, they returned, as I said, and accomplished great signs (Epiph. De mens. et pond. 15).

Epiphanius repeats the same tradition in two other passages, once saying that the mediator of the revelation was Christ himself. He also vacillates on whether Pella belonged to the Decapolis or to Perea (Ad. haer. 29. 7; 30. 2). Pella was actually located in the Decapolis (Pliny, Nat. hist. 5. 74)¹. It no longer seems possible to ascertain the sources whence Eusebius and Epiphanius derived their information concerning the Pella flight².

¹ Josephus has Pella lying on the border between Perea and the Decapolis (Bell. 3. 46f.).

² Suggestions include Aristo of Pella (Harnack), Julius Africanus (Hönnicke) and Hegesippus (Zahn); cf. H. J. Schoeps, Ebionitische Apokalyptik im Neuen Testament: Zeits. f. neut. Wiss. 51 (1960), p. 105.

Research on Christian origins had accepted the fourth century statements regarding the Pella flight almost without dissent until they were subjected to critical scrutiny by S. G. F. Brandon in 1951³. Brandon concluded that the tradition of a flight to Pella and a post-war resettlement in Jerusalem was probably developed as a result of two migrations. Sometime in the first century some Jewish Christians, perhaps from Galilee, settled in Pella and there constituted a church. Later this church got the wrong impression that its founders were representatives of the original Mother Church of Jerusalem. Eventually some of the Gentile members of the Pella Church may have migrated to Jerusalem, now called Aelia Capitolina, in the days of Emperor Hadrian when the city was repopulated with Gentiles only. It was natural, then, for this Jerusalem Church, composed of Gentiles, to trace its origins back through two migrations, now become legendary, to the first Jerusalem Church to which the apostles themselves belonged. But in Brandon's thesis the latter was far too involved with Jewish nationalism to leave Judea in her war for national independence and died fighting Rome at the Fall of Jerusalem. Brandon subsequently developed the thesis that this affinity with Zealotism may be traced back to Jesus himself⁴. While few scholars would be inclined to accept this last suggestion, a fair number have been convinced by Brandon's skepticism regarding the trustworthiness of the Pella flight tradition⁵. If his rejection of this tradition is well-founded, the implications are indeed far-reaching and require a revision of every important work on the history of primitive Christianity. In this paper we shall try to evaluate critically Brandon's objections to the accuracy of the flight to Pella tradition.

1.

Brandon emphasizes that during the period of the war the Jewish insurgents in control of *Jerusalem* made every effort to hamper

³ S. G. F. Brandon, *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church* (1951, 2nd ed. 1957), pp. 168–178.

⁴ Id., *Jesus and the Zealots* (1967).

⁵ G. Strecker, *Das Judenchristentum in den Pseudoklementinen* (1958), pp. 229–31; W. R. Farmer, *Maccabees, Zealots, and Josephus* (1957), p. 128 n. 2; J. Munck, *Jewish Christianity in the Post-Apostolic Times: New Test. Stud.* 6 (1959–60), p. 103f.; L. Gaston, *No Stone on Another* (1969), p. 142 n. 3.

desertions from the city (Josephus, Bell. 5. 420–23). So effective was this blockade that Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai had to make good his escape by being hidden in a coffin⁶. If the escape of one man was this difficult an undertaking, what chance would a large body of slow-moving fugitives, including elderly people and children, have had to withdraw from the city?

However, Brandon fails to note that the rebel leaders did not debar people from leaving the city until the later phases of the war. Although the Jewish forces won an impressive victory over the Twelfth Legion commanded by Cestius Gallus in November of 66 (Bell. 2. 517–55), many people in Jerusalem saw that eventually the Jewish side would suffer inevitable defeat. The realistic-minded began leaving the city in droves, apparently unimpeded. Josephus says, “After this catastrophe of Cestius many distinguished Jews abandoned the city as swimmers desert a sinking ship” (Bell. 2. 556)⁷. Another evidence that flight from Jerusalem was possible at least during the earlier period of the conflict is found in the Gospel of Luke, which scholarship almost without dissent dates in the post-war period. It urges:

But when you see Jerusalem encircled by armies, then know that her desolation has come near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, and those who are in her midst depart, and let not those in the country enter into her (Luke 21. 20f.).

Had not flight from the city been an open possibility at some time during the war, it would have made no sense for Luke to have included an entreaty to flee directed to the folk in Jerusalem. Josephus does not indicate any efforts to frustrate desertions from the city until the spring of 68 (Bell. 4. 377–379; 410).

Thus the Jerusalem Christians should not have experienced much difficulty leaving the city unless they delayed doing so until a rather late stage. The reason Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai had to make a furtive departure is that he waited until Titus had encircled Jerusalem and the Zealots had long since closed the gates to deserters. Epiphanius, of course, implies the Church did not flee until late, “when the city was about to be conquered by the

⁶ Midrash, *Ekaḥ* 10. 1. 5, cited by Brandon (n. 4), p. 215 n. 2.

⁷ H. Thackeray’s translation taken from the Loeb Classical Library edition, which is used throughout this work.

Romans" (De mens. et pond. 15), suggesting that the flight took place sometime in 70 after Titus' siege began. But Eusebius says the flight was "πρὸ τοῦ πολέμου" in response to something interpreted as a revelatory warning. The πόλεμος here may refer either to the first outbreak of fighting in the summer of 66 (Bell. 2. 284) or to the later campaign begun by Vespasian in 67 and completed by Titus in 70. In either case, Brandon is ready with an objection. If πρὸ τοῦ πολέμου means that the Christians fled to Pella before any fighting had taken place at all, it would put them in Pella before the Jewish massacre of the Roman garrison about September 66 (Bell. 2. 449–56). Accordingly they would have been there when the bands of Jewish terrorists laid waste to several cities east of the Jordan including Pella, slaughtering thousands of the inhabitants (Bell. 2. 458 ff.). Brandon reasons that the Christian fugitives would surely have perished at the hands of these men who would have meted out fit punishment against them as traitors who deserted Jerusalem's holy cause. Brandon assumes, of course, that the raiders would have been able to ferret out these Christian fugitives!

On the other hand if the πόλεμος in the Eusebius passage refers to the Roman campaign of 67–70, Brandon has another criticism of the tradition. In Pella "they would have been subject to the perils which must have beset every Jew when the troops of Vespasian subjugated Peraea in 68, for the legionaries or their auxiliaries are not likely to have discriminated between orthodox and Christian Jews"⁸. Brandon also speaks emphatically of "Vespasian's punitive expedition" in the vicinity of Pella in 68⁹.

Now the question is not whether the Romans distinguished between Christian and orthodox Jews, but whether they distinguished between Jews of the rebellion and Jews who wanted no part of it. In the quotation above the phrase "the perils which must have beset every Jew" implies that during the war Jews were subjected to an efficient and indiscriminate genocide. But this was not the case. It was in fact Roman policy *not* to shed the blood of Jews living in towns, such as Sepphoris and Gadara, that submitted to Roman subjugation without resistance (Bell. 3. 30–34; 59–63; 4. 417f.). In the case of Sepphoris the Romans even provided the citizens of that

⁸ Brandon (n. 3), p. 171; he cites Bell. 4. 413–39, which discusses how the Transjordanian territory involved in the revolt was subdued.

⁹ Brandon (n. 4), p. 210, again citing Bell. 4. 413–39.

city with a garrison of troops to protect them against the vindictive raids of their fellow Galileans (Vita 394f.)¹⁰. Jews living in Rome and on the islands of the Mediterranean were never molested during the war¹¹. Vespasian would have had no reason to send a “punitive expedition” against anyone living in Pella because that city had never been involved in the revolt¹². The reason for this is not far to seek. Pella was a staunchly pro-Roman Hellenistic city of the Decapolis¹³. The antipathy of that city toward political revolt against Rome made the city a logical choice for the Jerusalem Church, seeking a haven from rebellious territory, to settle in. Once the Christian refugees were there, there is every reason to think Vespasian’s troops left them in peace.

But what of the citizens of Pella? Having seen their city set afire and many of their neighbors killed by Jewish vandals in the summer of 66, would they have permitted Jewish Christians to find refuge in their city? Brandon thinks not. But trying to speculate about what a given population would or would not do under a set of circumstances such as we are discussing is problematic at best. All we can say with certainty is that the reactions of various communities to the Jewish terrorist attacks (Bell. 2. 458–60) were vastly different. In many Syrian towns these were taken as justification for murdering thousands of Jews; but Antioch, Sidon and Apamea refused to take vindictive action of any kind against their Jewish citizens (Bell. 2.461, 479). One of the Decapolis towns hit by the same series of Jewish assaults that Pella suffered was Gerasa; yet Josephus says the Gerasenes “abstained from mal-

¹⁰ Jews who supported the Roman side were richly rewarded afterward; see H. Graetz, *Volkstümliche Geschichte der Juden*, 2 (1888), p. 6.

¹¹ S. Zeitlin, *The Rise and Fall of the Judaean State*, 2 (1967), p. 249. It is worth noting that Titus for a time considered executing some of his own troops for murdering Jews that sought asylum among the Romans (Bell. 5. 553–561).

¹² In contrast to Perea; cf. Bell. 2. 566–568. After the raid by Jewish terrorists mentioned in Bell. 2. 458, Josephus never mentions any hostilities at Pella.

¹³ As Greeks who had suffered at the hands of Semites in the past, the citizens of Pella welcomed Pompey in 63 B. C. and continued to call themselves “Pompeians” thereafter. They looked to the Roman emperors as their benefactors and protectors. See G. A. Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land* (1931), pp. 397–408.

treating the Jews who remained with them” (ibid.). If there was no retaliation in Gerasa, why should there have been any in Pella, especially since Josephus does not list Pella among the towns where Jews experienced violent persecution? We can assume that by 66 there were Gentile Christians in the Decapolis¹⁴, including Pella, who may have acted as sponsors for the Jerusalem fugitives in those troubled days.

We have seen that Epiphanius reports that the refugee church returned to Jerusalem after the war. Eusebius fails to mention this, but he does imply it by resuming the story of the Jerusalem Church after the Fall with no indication that the post-war church is a body different from the previous one (Eus. Hist. 3. 11. 1 ff.). He lists the names of the fifteen Hebrew bishops who presided over this continuing body up to the expulsion of all Jews, including Jewish Christians, from the city in 135 (4. 5. 1–5), after which the Church at Aelia Capitolina was made up of Gentile members only. On the surface, at least, the list has an appearance of authenticity, for the majority of the names are clearly Jewish¹⁵. Eusebius also says before the Bar Cochba uprising the Jerusalem Church was rather large (Dem. ev. 3. 5. 10)¹⁶. But Brandon lodges the protest that if the Jerusalem Church had survived the war, wherever it continued to exist, Pella or Jerusalem, in the generations that followed it would have maintained the same unchallenged position of authority in doctrine we observe it commanding in Acts and Paul’s Epistles. When the rabbinic school represented by Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai moved from Jerusalem to Jabneh (Jamnia), the new school was quickly accepted as the successor of the old Jerusalem academy and was accorded all the authority the old center possessed. A change of location did not change its prestige. On the other hand, neither the subsequent church at Pella nor that at Aelia Capitolina

¹⁴ The Christian mission to the Decapolis seems to have come from Galilee and was several decades old when Mark wrote his Gospel. The origin of the Christian mission in that land seems to be the subject of the healing of the Gerasene demoniac (Mk. 5. 1–20). The story includes such missionary language as ἀπαγγέλλειν and κηρύσσειν. See further E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium des Markus* (1937), ad loc.

¹⁵ For an examination of this list of bishops see A. Schlatter, *Synagogue und Kirche bis zum Barkochba-Aufstand* (1966 reprint), pp. 111–153.

¹⁶ Epiphanius, however, says the church at that time was small and that there were seven synagogues in the city (De mens. et pond. 14).

enjoyed the prestige the original Jerusalem Church obviously possessed. Since Christian literature of the earliest centuries gives no evidence that there was any direct descendant of the Mother Church, we must conclude that it perished in the Fall of Jerusalem¹⁷. Thus Brandon comes to deny there even was a church in Jerusalem between 70 A.D. and the founding of Aelia Capitolina¹⁸.

The question whether a church existed in Jerusalem during the years 70–135 A.D. is linked to the larger question of whether *any* Jewish population lived in the city in the last decades of the first century. Writing seven or eight years after the Fall, Josephus makes this statement:

Caesar ordered the whole city and the temple to be razed to the ground, leaving only the loftiest of the towers, Phasaël, Hippicus, and Mariamme, and the portion of the wall enclosing the city on the west: the latter as an encampment for the garrison that was to remain, and the towers to indicate to posterity the nature of the city and of the strong defences which had yet yielded to Roman prowess. All the rest of the wall encompassing the city was so completely levelled to the ground as to leave future visitors to the spot no ground for believing that it had ever been inhabited (Jos. Bell. 7. 1–3).

Some have taken this to mean that the city, except for military personnel (Bell. 7. 5), was deserted for years following the war¹⁹. If this were the case, obviously there would not have been a church in Jerusalem during this period, and the statements of Epiphanius, Eusebius, Hegesippus and others to the contrary must be considered of no historical worth.

Some years ago Adolph Schlatter found in rabbinic writings evidence of a Jewish community in Jerusalem during the reign of Domitian. He noted that there were representatives from Jerusalem at the Council of Jamnia. Rabbi Eleasar ben Zadok and Abba Saul are reported to have lived in Jerusalem during the time in question. Both were shop owners in Jerusalem, and Rabbi Eleasar is remembered as having purchased the Alexandrian synagogue building

¹⁷ Brandon (n. 4), pp. 215f.

¹⁸ Brandon (n. 3), p. 173 n. 1.

¹⁹ Cf. L. Duchesne, *Early History of the Christian Church*, 2 (1909), p. 87: "A return to Jerusalem was out of the question; it had been so completely razed to the ground that it was difficult to believe it had ever been inhabited, and for sixty years the camp of the tenth legion (*leg. X Fretensis*) was the only sign of life."

(Acts 6.9)²⁰. Epiphanius also tells us that Rabbi Aquila was converted to Judaism in Jerusalem during this period (*De mens. et pond.* 15). Josephus does recall that at the time Masada fell (73 A.D.) there were some women and a few old men living in Jerusalem (*Bell.* 7.376f.).

As to the archaeological evidence concerning the question, W.F. Albright has written:

It has sometimes been supposed that the Jews returned to Jerusalem and continued to maintain some sort of communal life there. Archaeological evidence is wholly against this view. Not a single one of the many Jewish tombs which have been excavated in the region of Jerusalem can be dated to the period after A.D. 70; every inscribed ossuary hitherto discovered near Jerusalem belongs to the last century of the Second Temple (30 B.C.—A.D. 70)²¹.

Albright said this in 1954, and it was a fair statement at the time. Since then, however, excavations of a necropolis discovered at the Franciscan monastery, *Dominus Flevit*, on the Mt. of Olives have required that this judgment be abandoned. The tombs found on the site range in age roughly from Herodian to Byzantine times. P. Bellarmino Bagatti, who led the excavation work, has determined that several of the Jewish ossuaries were placed in their tombs during the period 70–135 A.D. The dating was arrived at partly by studying the relative positions of the ossuaries in question, but chiefly by paleographic investigations of their inscriptions conducted by J. T. Milik²². These ossuaries have given us good archaeo-

²⁰ Schlatter (n. 15), pp. 78–86; P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar*, 2 (1924), p. 663f.

²¹ W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine* (1954), p. 241.

²² P. B. Bagatti and J. T. Milik, *Gli Scavi del „Dominus Flevit“*: *Pubblicazioni dello Studium Biblicum Franciscanum*, 13, 1 (1958), pp. 70–109. By comparing the inscriptions with stylistic peculiarities present in the materials from Murabba'at, Milik concluded that a number of ossuaries come from the same period (the first third of the second century A. D.). But the scholarly public will probably be more intrigued with Bagatti's suggestion that the *remains of Jewish Christians* are found in a number of the ossuaries. He arrives at this judgment chiefly by reason of the symbols inscribed on them. Certainly the most interesting of these is the chi superimposed on a rho in ossuary 21 of tomb 79 belonging to a "Jude the proselyte of Tyre", which may be likened to a Constantinian monogram (cf. pp. 6–9; 178f.; plate as frontispiece), and may have been intended as an abbreviation of the name of Christ. Such mysterious markings, however, admit of various explanations.

logical evidence that there was in fact a Jewish settlement of the city throughout the period the patristic evidence places a predominantly Jewish congregation there.

It is not too difficult to understand why the post-war Church of Jerusalem, although descending directly from the Mother Church, did not enjoy the prestige it had during Paul's ministry. When Paul began his ministry, the original disciples of the Lord formed a kind of apostolic college in Jerusalem which has been compared to a school of rabbinic teachers responsible for transmitting the instruction they in turn had received²³. The apostolic college was available to give inquiring persons the most accurate and official instruction available concerning the words and deeds of Jesus. Thus we hear that three years after Paul's conversion he journeyed to Jerusalem in order to "gain information from Peter" concerning Jesus' teaching and ministry²⁴. The Jerusalem Church enjoyed pre-eminence, not because it was the original church (the one in Galilee could make the same claim)²⁵, but because it was the place of the apostolic college. As the years passed, the membership of this apostolic college was thinned by death and migration (Acts 12. 2, 17), since there was no way of replenishing the declining membership²⁶. After the war was over, what membership of the original apostolic college was still alive had to be recalled to Jerusalem from elsewhere to elect Symeon the son of Clopas as head of the Jerusalem Church (Eus. Hist. 3. 11. 1)²⁷. By the time the church had returned from Pella, it had for some time been without any of the remaining disciples of the historical Jesus. This might not have caused the post-war Jerusalem Church to suffer a loss of prestige had it not been for the Ephesian Church retaining the services of the Apostle John

²³ B. Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript* (1961), pp. 214ff.

²⁴ Concerning this translation of ἱστορήσαι Κηφᾶν and its meaning in Gal. 1. 18, see C. D. Kilpatrick, Gal. 1: 18 ἹΣΤΟΡΗΣΑΙ ΚΗΦΑΝ: *New Testament Essays. Studies in Memory of T. W. Manson* (1959), pp. 144-149.

²⁵ See L. E. Elliott-Binns, *Galilean Christianity* (1956).

²⁶ O. Cullmann, *Die Tradition als exegetisches, historisches und theologisches Problem* (1954), pp. 29ff.

²⁷ One patristic tradition says the apostles remained in Jerusalem twelve years: Apollonius in Eus. Hist. 5. 18. 14; Acta Petri, c. 5; Clement Strom. 6. 5. 43. For other durations see E. Hennecke, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 2 (1965), p. 44f.

for many years in the post-war period²⁸. After looking to Ephesus so long for instruction during the post-war period, the Christian community never reoriented itself toward Jerusalem as the locus of its standards, for by the time John died, it had learned to look to its Gospels as the new sources of authority.

2.

In support of his thesis, Brandon lays stress on the fact that the supposed flight to Pella passed completely uncommemorated in the earliest *Christian literature*. In the balance of this study we shall interrogate several passages of early Christian literature to see if there is perhaps a memory of the Pella flight preserved in sources much earlier than Eusebius and Epiphanius.

The first passage for consideration is found in the Ascension of Isaiah 4. 1–14. The actual time the work reached its present form need not concern us here. It is generally agreed that the passage we are concerned with is part of a Christian apocalyptic tract written in the latter part of the first century²⁹. It is revealed to King Hezekiah that Beliar will become incarnate in a wicked king (Nero) who will demand to be worshipped and will persecute the Church. “One of the twelve (Apostles) will be delivered into his hand” (4. 3)³⁰. Quite clearly this refers to the martyrdom of Peter in the Neronian persecution. The seer then lets us know that he is writing very close to the events he is describing by predicting the Parousia to come 1332 days after Peter’s martyrdom (4. 14; cf. Dan. 12. 12), i.e., in 68 or 69 A.D.³¹. His description is therefore contemporary with the Jewish-Roman War. During this period he notices believers in Christ “fleeing from desert to desert and awaiting his coming”

²⁸ The patristic evidence (cf. J. H. Bernard’s commentary on John, 1, pp. xlvi–lv) for John’s lengthy ministry in Ephesus seems to me incontrovertible.

²⁹ W. J. Deane, *Pseudepigrapha* (1891), p. 271f.; E. Tisserant, *Ascension d’Isaie* (1909), p. 121.

³⁰ Hennecke (n. 27), p. 648f.

³¹ See O. Cullmann, *Petrus, Jünger – Apostel – Märtyrer* (1952), pp. 82–135, for a discussion of the evidence that Peter died in Rome during the Neronian persecution of 64 A. D.

(4. 13)³². This sounds more descriptive of a flight somewhere in Palestine than in the vicinity of Rome. We therefore choose, with E. Stauffer, to take it as a reference to the Jerusalem Church's flight to Pella³³.

Ever since the exegesis proposed by E. Renan, many scholars have been inclined to interpret the scene in Rev. 12. 1–17 as a description of the Pella flight³⁴. Brandon protests against this interpretation, pointing out that we have to do with apocalyptic imagery in the passage which should not be pressed to give us precise historical information. But the chapter is patently describing historical occurrences (for example the birth and crucifixion-exaltation of Christ, v. 5, and the persecution of the Church, v. 17) in mythological terms. It must be admitted that the chapter contains a number of obscure references, but there are also several details that are quite clear which we may proceed to enumerate: (1) At the beginning of the allegory the woman stands for Israel, v. 1³⁵, (2) who gives birth to the Messiah, v. 2. (3) The Messiah is exalted to heaven, v. 5, and (4) after this the woman becomes a symbol of the Mother Church, v. 17 (cf. "her offspring"). (5) The woman flees for shelter into the wilderness where she remains for three and a half years, vv. 6 and 12. (6) If the woman's flight does refer to an historical event, the context in the Apocalypse would require that it be dated sometime in the period of the war³⁶. The discussion about "water as a river" (12. 15f.) is obscure and will be taken up a little later. V. 6 states once the woman is in the place prepared for her in the wilderness, "they may nourish her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days". As the unnamed subject of the verb τρέφωσιν, we should like to propose the members of the Gentile churches of the Decapolis who were in a position to extend aid to the Christian refugees from Jerusalem.

Brandon thinks if it were not for the accounts in Eusebius and Epiphanius, no one ever would have thought Rev. 12 is describing

³² Hennecke (n. 27), p. 649.

³³ E. Stauffer, *Jesus. Gestalt und Geschichte* (1957), p. 138 n. 90.

³⁴ E. Renan, *Antichrist* (Eng. tr. 1899), pp. 150ff.

³⁵ The crown of twelve stars is a clear enough indication of this. The mention of the sun and moon is prompted by the similar description in Gen. 37. 9.

³⁶ The subject of the preceding chapter (11) is judgment upon the temple and the holy city at the hands of the Gentiles (cf. especially vv. 1–2).

a flight of Jewish Christians into Transjordan. But if a commentator is convinced the Apocalypse is, for the most part, describing historical events which occurred in the first century, it seems to me he would have to hypothesize such an escape to have taken place from the abundant clues given in the present passage.

Another witness in support of the flight to Pella tradition, this time an Ebionite source, has been turned up recently by H. J. Schoeps in the Pseudo-Clementine literature (Rec. 1. 37, 39)³⁷. In a speech the Apostle Peter explains that the coming of the True Prophet, Jesus, was to make an end to the sacrificial cult in Jerusalem's temple. Announcing that the temple was to be destroyed, Jesus instituted baptism to take the place of sacrifice. Not only does baptism absolve one of sins, it also has prophylactic qualities:

... every one who, believing in this Prophet who had been foretold by Moses, is baptized in His name, shall be kept unhurt from the destruction of war which impends over the unbelieving nation, and the place itself [i.e., Jerusalem's temple] ... those who do not believe shall be made exiles from their place and kingdom... (Clem. Rec. 1. 39)³⁸.

This is an important recollection from a tradition definitely outside Catholic Christianity. While an escape from the city is not explicitly mentioned, the description nevertheless seems to presuppose one in order for the Jerusalem Christians to have been spared the fate common to all others living in their city in 70 A.D.

G. Strecker has joined Brandon in rejecting the Pella flight testimony and has insisted that nowhere do we find any evidence of such a flight in the Synoptic Tradition³⁹. In what follows we shall argue that knowledge of such a flight is reflected in the Synoptic Apocalypse (Mt. 24. 15–22; Mk. 13. 14–20; Lk. 21.20–24) and that the details given are sufficient so that, with the aid of information supplied by Josephus, we are even in a position to suggest an approximate time the flight must have taken place.

Mk. 13.14 warns: "And when you see τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως ἐστηκότα where he ought not (let the reader understand), then let

³⁷ H. J. Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums* (1949), pp. 47f., 267.

³⁸ Translation by T. Smith in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 8 (1951 reprint), p. 88.

³⁹ G. Strecker, *Das Judenchristentum in den Pseudoklementinen* (1958), p. 230.

those in Judea flee to the mountains.” Mt.24. 15 modifies the oracle to read ἐστὸς ἐν τόπῳ ἁγίῳ i.e., in the Jerusalem temple. The phrase βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως is from Dan. 12. 11 where it refers to Antiochus Epiphanes’ desecration of the temple’s altar by placing an idol of Zeus on it to which sacrifices were made (I Macc. 1. 54, 59, 6. 7; II Macc. 6. 2). Attention was again drawn to Daniel’s prophecy of an idolatrous desecration of the temple as a sign that the end is at hand by both Jewish and Christian apocalyptic circles in the year 40 A.D. when Caligula laid plans to have an image of himself placed in Jerusalem’s temple⁴⁰. About this period there was a flurry of prophetic activity in the Jerusalem Church, and the Mk. 13. 14 oracle apparently stems from someone in the group of prophets we read about in Acts 11. 27f. who borrowed ideas and phrases from Daniel and I Macc. (καὶ ἔφυγεν αὐτὸς καὶ οἱ υἱοὶ αὐτοῦ εἰς τὰ ὄρη, I Macc. 2. 28). Interest in an eschatological desecration of the temple foretold by the prophets did not subside with the assassination of Caligula (41 A.D.). During the decades leading up to the war, no doubt there were Jewish as well as Christian apocalyptists looking for a Caligula Redivivus. By the year 50 when Paul wrote of his understanding of the oracle (II Thess. 2. 1–10), it had become a prediction of an actual enthronement of a self-deifying emperor in the temple. The shift of interest from an image to a man is evidently the reason Mark’s version has the masculine ἐστηκότα (cf. the change in Mt. 24. 15 to ἐστός to agree with τὸ βδέλυγμα).

Josephus witnesses to an interesting variation on the theme of a desecration of the temple prophetically foretold. He writes:

For there was an ancient saying of inspired men that the city would be taken and the sanctuary burnt to the ground by right of war, whensoever it should be visited by sedition and native hands should be the first to defile God’s sacred precincts (Bell. 4. 388).

We gather, then, that during the war Jewish apocalyptists in Jerusalem were proclaiming some oracle which expected a desecration of the temple by a Jew or Jews, rather than a heathen prince, to precede its fall. Whether the ancient oracle Josephus means was “discovered” for the first time during the war or was well-known beforehand need not concern us here. The historian goes on to say;

⁴⁰ See Philo, *De Legatione ad Gaium*; Jos. Ant. 18. 261–308, Bell. 2. 184–203; Tac. Hist. 5. 9.

This saying the Zealots did not disbelieve; yet they lent themselves as instruments of its accomplishment.

Josephus is referring to a whole series of villainous acts committed by the Zealots in the temple precincts during the period beginning with the arrival of John of Gischala in Jerusalem in November, 67 (Bell. 4. 121) up to early spring of 68. During this time the Zealots moved into and occupied the temple area (Bell. 4. 151ff.), allowed persons who had committed barbarous acts to roam about freely in the Holy of Holies (Bell. 4. 183), and committed murder right within the temple itself (Bell. 4. 343).

If the Zealots and others knew of such an oracle concerning a *Jewish* desecration of the temple as Josephus describes, it is probable that Christians in the city at this time must have been aware of it too. In fact it is quite likely that it suggested to the church a new interpretation of the oracle preserved in Mk. 13. 14. If this is so, what particular sacrilege committed by a Jew in those days could the Jerusalem Church have recognized as “the abomination that makes desolate standing where *he* ought not” so as to be an eschatological warning to “flee to the mountains”? I should like to suggest it was the Zealots’ election of the low born and unworthy Phanni to the holy office of High Priest (Bell. 4. 147–155). Those priests who were accomplices of the Zealots created a farce out of the investiture of the clown Phanni:

At any rate they dragged their reluctant victim out of the country and, dressing him up for his assumed part, as on the stage, put the sacred vestments upon him and instructed him how to act in keeping with the occasion. To them this monstrous impiety was a subject for jesting and sport, but the other priests, beholding from a distance this mockery of their law, could not restrain their tears and bemoaned the degradation of the sacred honours (Bell. 4. 156f.).

Many Jewish Christians would have found this spectacle just as offensive as Josephus did, for while Jesus and his brother James were both put to death at the instigation of high priests, the office itself nevertheless remained sacred for many Christians⁴¹. These

⁴¹ The Apostle Paul apologizes for his intemperate outburst once he learns he has been addressing the High Priest (Acts 23. 3–5); the Fourth Gospel credits anyone serving as High Priest with having the gift of prophecy (11. 51); the high regard for the priestly office is obvious in I Clem. 40. 1–41. 4 where the office becomes a pattern to be followed by the Christian

same people could have recognized in Phanni the “abomination that makes desolate standing where he ought not”, i.e., “ἐν τόπῳ ἀρίῳ”⁴² making the temple so impure that its coming desolation was sealed. The saying in Mk. 13. 14 therefore seems to have served as the “oracle” Eusebius (Hist. 3.4.3) refers to which the church took as its warning to flee.

The oracle indicates the direction of the flight as “to the mountains”. Since Jerusalem itself is in the mountains, the church most likely understood the oracle to be referring to some other range of mountains than the one in which Jerusalem is located. One would have to look to the Transjordanian mountains to find the nearest such range. Pella qualifies as a city of refuge in the terms of the oracle since it is in the foothills of these mountains⁴².

Josephus indicates it was possible to take flight from the city in the days following Cestius Gallus’ retreat (November of 66; Bell. 2.556). Egress from the city appears not to have been hindered by the Zealots until immediately before Passover of 68 (Bell. 4.377–379; 410). Since the investiture of Phanni and other events mentioned above fall in the winter of 67–68, this seems the most probable time for the Pella flight to have taken place. Moreover, there was a lull in the fighting during the period following the reduction of Galilee in November of 67 (Bell. 4.120) and prior to the offensive in Perea the next spring (Bell. 4.412f.). Mk. 13. 18 hopes that the flight may not have to be in χειμῶν which may mean “winter”, but perhaps here should be translated “stormy weather”⁴³. Such weather would make transit most difficult for a body of Christian fugitives. If the flight were during or after a heavy amount of rainfall, the Jordan River, which would have to be crossed to get to Pella, would be high and very hazardous to ford. At one time during the spring of 68, due to recent rainstorms the Jordan was too high and swift for Gadarene

ministry. The Jerusalem Church drew converts from the Jewish priesthood (Acts 6. 7), and judging from Hegesippus’ description of James (Eus. Hist. 2. 23. 5–18), the Brother of the Lord was apparently a priest himself. On this point see Brandon (n. 4), pp. 122–125.

⁴² The reader may examine the terrain around Pella in the photo published by R. Funk and H. Neil Richardson together with the report of their excavation at Pella (Khirbet Fahil), *The 1958 Sounding at Pella: The Bibl. Archaeol.* 21 (1958), p. 83.

⁴³ See W. Bauer’s lexicon.

fugitives to cross from east to west to seek safety in Jericho (Bell. 4.433). Rev. 12.15–16 suggests that the water of the Jordan had recently been high, but subsided long enough to enable the fugitive church to make a safe crossing:

And out of his mouth the serpent cast water as a river after the woman, in order that he might sweep her away with the stream. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed the river which the dragon had cast out of his mouth.

Josephus reports there was a heavy rainstorm while the Idumeans were encamped around the city. They had come intending to aid their Zealot allies who were occupying the temple and who were also being threatened by the troops of Ananus (Bell. 4. 286)⁴⁴. If this storm had coincided too closely with the church's flight, the results might have proved disastrous as the band of believers tried desperately to cross a swollen river before hostilities were again resumed. Thus when Eusebius says that the flight took place *πρὸ τοῦ πολέμου* (Hist. 3.5.3), he may be saying "before the southern offensive in the Spring of 68".

Finding refuge in Pella, the church remained there for the duration of the war. Afterward some, but probably not all, returned to Jerusalem. If the woman's length of stay in the wilderness given in Rev. 12.6, 14 as approximately three and a half years is meant to be taken literally, the return, reckoning from our dating of the flight, would have occurred sometime in the summer of 71.

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⁴⁴ Lk. 21. 20–21 considers the arrival of military forces which surround the city, rather than any sacrilege in the temple, as the prophetic sign warning the church to flee the city. Long before Titus' troops arrived, the Zealots had moved to prevent persons from deserting Jerusalem. Thus Luke may be thinking of the earlier encirclement by the Idumean troops.