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JERUSALEM, THE MOTHER CHURCH

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE APOSTOLIC CHURCH FROM
THE PERSPECTIVE OF JERUSALEM

Describing the apostolic period from the perspective of Jerusalem is a challenge, but if it is true that the church of Jerusalem is the mother church of all Christians, it will no doubt be worth the effort.

In attempting to do so, this article takes a tripartite form.

To begin with, the centrality of Jerusalem during the apostolic period is highlighted, paying special attention to the written sources, and taking into consideration that Jerusalem, the holy city, was the spiritual heart of the whole world.

Following, the article will look at the development of Jerusalem after Pentecost; with the northward flight of many Jewish-Christian believers as a result of Stephen's death by stoning, the mother church gained a daughter in Antioch.

Finally, Jerusalem is explored as the mother church that distributed various letters to its children: as a collection, the seven so-called 'Catholic Epistles' document the missionary progress that moved outward from Jerusalem. The Jerusalem perspective of two other non-Pauline books of the New Testament – Hebrews and Revelation – will also be considered.

Thus, an overall picture of the development of the apostolic church from the Jerusalem perspective is built up.

Part I: The centrality of Jerusalem

1. The apostolic period

The twelve apostles, disciples of the Lord himself, were first charged to lead the church in Jerusalem, and to carry forth the gospel. They became 'carriers' in two senses: they themselves were the pillars of the gospel; they also had the task of carrying the gospel out into the world, starting from Jerusalem. In this way, their voice echoed: for what the apostles broadcast, was a news-making and much talked-about gospel. Paul was a later addition to the number of the apostles: after 'the Twelve', he was the thirteenth and last. He was an extra labourer, so to speak, for external duties. It would be difficult to provide a complete collection of biographies concerning the

individual apostles, some of whom remain almost entirely unknown. In this article the accent, therefore, will lie on the joint activity of the Twelve and those in their immediate circle. The course of their lives stood in service to their witness of Christ, Israel's Messiah and the Saviour of the world. We have chosen to take Jerusalem as the redemptive-historical focal point, enabling us to gain a view of the gospel, as it was proclaimed and passed on during the apostolic period.¹

The 'apostolic period' is commonly understood to be the earliest phase of Christianity (in German, *Urchristentum*). Beginning in Jerusalem, the gospel creates ever-widening circles in the world, just as a stone sends out ripples in a pond. Some date the end of this period with the death of the last apostle, John. Others see its end with the final separation of Judaism and Christianity, after the Bar Kochba revolt in AD 135. This coincides, more or less, with Eusebius' description of the apostolic era: starting with the period after the Ascension (see the foreword to his *Ecclesiastical History* II) and continuing till the reign of emperor Trajan. Eusebius comments: "We have now described the facts which have come to our knowledge concerning the Apostles and their times" (περί τε τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ τῶν ἀποστολικῶν χρόνων; *Ecclesiastical History* III 31,6; cf. II 14,3)².

The two most important documentary sources for the apostolic period are the *Book of Acts* in the Bible and Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*. We will examine each of them, providing a methodological account.

2. The first source: The Book of Acts

For the history of earliest Christianity we have access to a historic source in the form of a Biblical book, with a more-or-less official title: *The Acts of the Apostles*. It is commonly accepted that Luke wrote this book, as a sequel to his gospel. Both Luke's gospel and this sequel dealing with the apostles were dedicated to a certain Theophilus. Luke, who was not of Jewish descent (it seems likely that he, like Cornelius, belonged to the circle of 'God-fearing Gentiles', adherents of the synagogue), had become a Christian, and was a frequent companion of the apostle Paul. In narrative form, he recounts the spread of Christianity within the Roman Empire. Into this account, he integrates several discourses given by the apostles. There can be no doubt that Luke, in writing this book, drew on a number of oral and written sources. In this way, his book became a coherent and well-attested whole.

From the perspective of the history of religion, the Book of Acts is quite unique. Of the other world religions, none has a comparable historical work, throwing light on its origins, that can be dated to its own time. Other religions may have narrative texts of a more legendary character; for those without such legendary narrative texts, their early histories must be reconstructed by means of later material. In contrast to this, however, the Book of Acts provides us with a contemporaneous historical account.

Some scholars might attempt to weaken this conclusion with a claim that the Book of Acts is largely theological in character. Of course it is true that Luke, a

¹ James D.G. Dunn, *Beginning from Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

² Adelbert Davids, "The Era of the Apostles According to Eusebius' *History of the Church*." In *The Apostolic Age in Patristic Thought*, ed. A. Hilhorst (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 194-203.

believing Christian, had his own perspective on the church and the world. He makes horizontal as well as vertical connections. Hengel has rightly described him as a ‘theological historian’³. Luke is writing redemptive history, but he does so in a way that does justice to its historical scholarship. In the preface to his gospel, Luke notes that he has carefully investigated everything from the beginning, so that Theophilus might know the certainty of the things he had been taught (Luke 1:4).

Research into the geographic and topographic information given in the Book of Acts, the personal titles, and other details have increasingly confirmed, after some initial scepticism, that Luke carried out painstakingly careful work. True, he has stylistically edited the apostles’ discourses, but without harming the authenticity of their content. In doing so, Luke follows the lead of the Greek historian Thucydides who, with his account of the Peloponnesian War, set the standard for the historiography of his time. Thucydides, in recording a number of discourses throughout his works, took great pains to represent the speakers’ lines of thought accurately, whenever a verbatim account was not available.⁴

One must then, even if some questions might arise at specific points of detail, read the Book of Acts as a piece of serious historiography. This historical source is invaluable for our knowledge of earliest Christianity.

3. The second source: Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History*

Eusebius (circa 263-339 AD), who was a student of Pamphilius of Caesarea, and who later succeeded him as bishop, is often considered the father of church history.⁵ This is largely due to his impressive ten-part *Ecclesiastical History*, in which he “purposed to record in writing the successions of the sacred apostles, covering the period stretching from our Saviour to ourselves” (*Ecclesiastical History* I 1,1).

Eusebius painstakingly searched archives and libraries to find material from the first three centuries of the history of the Christian church. In contrast to the historiographical tradition that Thucydides and Luke followed, Eusebius includes very few addresses or discourses in his work. Sometimes he does insert older documents, or excerpts from them. For example, he quotes Flavius Josephus approximately thirty times. It should also be noted that Eusebius does not restrict his quotes and references to Jewish authors. He also makes particular use of various early Christian authors: Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Justin, Hegesippus, Origen and Dionysius of Alexandria. In addition, he refers to the writers of the ancient classics, and the philosophical streams that flowed from them. Eusebius’ *History*, supported by source references and quotations, is a complex whole, mentioning what is – for modern readers – a dizzying array of names.

Of course, Eusebius is no modern historian. While he occasionally takes a critical view of his sources, to modern historians he comes across to as being too credulous. He passes on stories that modern readers would find hard to believe. He comments

³ Martin Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM, 1979), 59.

⁴ Armin Daniel Baum, *Pseudepigraphie und literarische Fälschung im frühen Christentum* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001).

⁵ Friedhelm Winkelmann, *Euseb von Kaisarea. Der Vater der Kirchengeschichte* (Berlin: Verlags-Anstalt Union, 1991).

in a fashion that betrays his own – sometimes theological – interpretation of events. He took the motif of truth from classical historiography as being synonymous with the truth of the gospel (*Ecclesiastical History* I 5,1).

None of this, of course, negates that Eusebius sets out to work as a true historian, one basing his work on careful examination of historical sources, and who expects his readers to take him seriously. His *Ecclesiastical History* functions for us as the voice of someone who has a worthwhile contribution to make, and who also allows earlier voices to be heard.

A continuing thread in Eusebius' *History* is the apostolic succession throughout various congregations and regions during the first centuries of the Christian era. Eusebius regarded this as evidence of the guiding hand of God, leading eventually to the freedom Christians gained during the rule of Constantine. Eusebius considers the Christian church to be the special people of God in the world, as is evident from this passage:

For when the advent of our Saviour, Jesus Christ, recently shone forth on all men, it was confessedly a new race which has thus appeared in such numbers, in accordance with the ineffable prophecies of the date, and is honoured by all by the name of Christ, but it is not little nor weak, nor founded in some obscure corner of the earth, but the most populous of all nations, and most pious towards God, alike innocent and invincible in that it ever finds help from God (*Ecclesiastical History* I 4,2; cf. X 4,19-20: "Who established a nation never heard of since time began?").

4. Jerusalem, a world city

Jerusalem would not be the first place that comes to mind when thinking of a great world city. It is really no cosmopolitan metropolis, such as New York is today, or as Rome was in antiquity. Still, considered with regard to religion, Jerusalem could be counted as a world city. It is the only place in the world that is known as the 'holy city'. For centuries, it has been a place of pilgrimage for Jews, Christians and Muslims; at the same time it has always been a place of conflict.

Jerusalem has an extraordinary history.⁶ From of old, it was the city of the temple, and as such, the centre of the Holy Land. Jerusalem was called 'the holy city' because that is where the holy God of Israel chose to dwell in His temple. It was the focal point of divine presence, not just in the Old Testament, but also in the New: 'the city of the great King' (Psalm 48:3; Matthew 5:35). Jerusalem was the place where Jesus of Nazareth was crucified, and where by the power of His Spirit, the first Christian community came into being. This is where the apostles proclaimed the gospel of their living Lord. From there, the apostolic gospel was carried outwards, into the world.

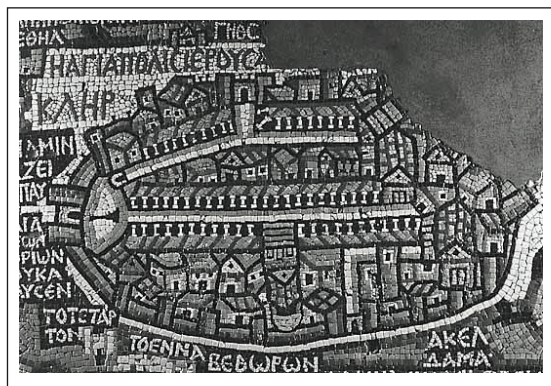
Not only has Jerusalem had a remarkable history: it has also been promised a wonderful future. In the Bible, we discover the contours of a new city. According to divine promise, this new city will unite heaven and earth.

The central position of Jerusalem is beautifully portrayed on the 6th century floor mosaic at Madaba, in Jordan. This topographical mosaic, with a floor area of

⁶ Küchler's historical guide is very informative. See Max Küchler, *Jerusalem. Ein Handbuch und Studienreiseführer zur Heiligen Stadt* (Tübingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007).

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around 30 square metres, was intended to map out the most notable places of the sacred history of Syria, Palestine and Egypt.⁷ Jerusalem, positioned in the centre, completely surrounded by a wall and lavishly furnished with gates, is larger than any other city. The same is true of its inscription, in large red script: ‘the holy city Jerusalem’. The city is in the shape of a perfect oval, and is clearly typified as the ideal city, the centre of the holy land, the navel of the earth (Ezekiel 38:12, cf. 5:5 and the explanation of Acts 2:9-11, below).⁸



In what is clearly a Christian representation, not only is the temple itself missing, the whole temple mount is nowhere to be seen. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, traditionally the place – originally outside the city wall – of Jesus’ crucifixion and burial, has taken over the place of the temple complex in the heart of the city. Perhaps the floor mosaic of Madaba was intended to portray the New Jerusalem, the city of the future, in which there is no temple at all, “because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Revelation 21:22)

5. Jerusalem as a locus of activity

In Luke’s twin volumes, the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, the city of Jerusalem takes a central role. Luke’s gospel, built up geographically, describes the movement of the gospel towards Jerusalem. In the Acts of the Apostles, Luke picks up the thread of the story again, starting in Jerusalem, and going out from there into the world. In this way, Jerusalem forms the geographical centre of Luke and Acts. More than that, the central position of Jerusalem symbolises the theological point that salvation is from the Jews.⁹ Jesus is the Messiah of Israel, and at the same time the Saviour of the world.

To gain a clearer picture of the centrality of Jerusalem, the enumeration of

⁷ Herbert Donner, *The Mosaic Map of Madaba. An Introductory Guide* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1992); see also http://198.62.75.1/www1/ofm/mad/Madaba_Mosaic_Map.html and Yoram Tzafrir’s article on this website: *The Holy City of Jerusalem in the Madaba Map*.

⁸ Philip S. Alexander, “Jerusalem as the ‘Omphalos’ of the World: On the History of a Geographical Concept,” *Judaism* 46.2 (1997): 147-158; Michael Tilly, *Jerusalem – Nabel der Welt. Überlieferung und Funktionen von Heiligtumstraditionen im antiken Judentum* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2002).

⁹ Oskar Skarsaune, *In the Shadow of the Temple. Jewish Influences on Early Christianity* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), chapter 4 [Jerusalem: The City of the Temple].

peoples that we find in Acts 2 provides a useful starting point. There one finds a list of God-fearing Jews, living in Jerusalem, from every nation under heaven. These diasporic Jews were filled with utter amazement because of the spectacular events of Pentecost, and were particularly perplexed because they heard all kinds of languages being spoken. Luke records them as saying: “Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” (Acts 2:9-11). This list of nations is no random tally. It draws the reader’s focus towards a circular movement centred on Jerusalem. This is true in both religious and geographical senses.

Regarding the religious sense, many commentators have already observed that this list does not represent the political situation of the Roman Empire. Instead, it encompasses the Jewish diaspora that had already taken place before this time. Further to this, it includes places which had never been part of the Roman Empire. Luke shows his readers that there were Jews living throughout the known world.

Concerning the geographical sense, one noteworthy aspect is that Judea is included in the list of nations. Luke is not referring to the immediate region of ‘Judea’, for in Luke and Acts this only occurs when Judea and Galilee are mentioned together. Rather, this is to be understood as encompassing the Jewish homeland as a whole, with Jerusalem as its capital; in later years, the entire Roman province was to be known as Judaea (Luke 1:5; 4:44; 6:17; 7:17; 23:5; Acts 11:29; 15:1; 28:21). In showing that Jews were living throughout the world, Luke cannot leave out the Jewish homeland itself. In this context, Jerusalem and its surroundings are unmistakably the heart of the known world. It may then be concluded that in this list ‘Judea’ serves, as Bauckham has shown, as the geographical centre of the Jewish diaspora, a diaspora that fanned out in all directions.¹⁰

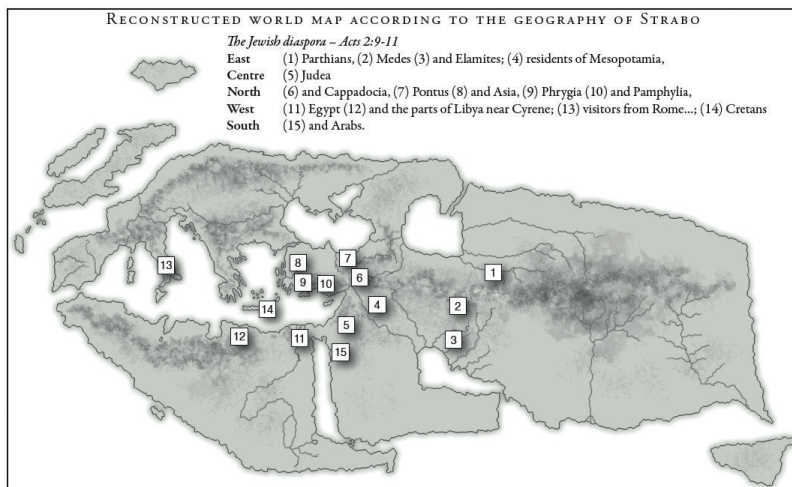
Luke points out that this entire diaspora was represented in Jerusalem at the miracle of languages at Pentecost. They were “God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven”. From Judea, the geographical heart of the Jewish world, one’s attention is first drawn towards the east: Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia. Then it is turned northward: residents of Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia. From there one looks to the west: Egypt, Libya and Cyrene; visitors from Rome, and Crete. Finally one’s focus is drawn to the south: Arabia. The effect of this ordering is to show readers that the place where the Spirit was poured out dominates the perspective towards all four points of the compass.

To his audience, Peter says that their conversion will have worldwide effects: “The promise [this being a reference to the Spirit, promised by God and given at Pentecost] is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39). The reference to those ‘far off’ concerns those scattered far from Jerusalem in the diaspora, in every direction throughout the world.

¹⁰ Richard Bauckham, “James and the Jerusalem Church.” In *The Book of Acts in Its First-Century Setting. Volume 4: Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 415-480. Bauckham bases his description on a reconstruction of a world map of the time, taken from Strabo’s *Geographica* (420).

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In other words, whether one is a Jew by birth, or joined to Israel as a proselyte, none who in any way belongs to the Jewish world can ignore Judea, with Jerusalem as its capital and its centre. Luke was only too aware, says Bauckham, that it was from the holy city that Christianity had spread in all directions. In this way, Jerusalem could be seen as the centre of the whole earth. That is where, on the day of Pentecost, it all happened!



Part II: The development of Jerusalem

6. The place where the first church gathered

It happened, then, in Jerusalem. Where, exactly? Luke records that Jesus disciples ‘stayed continually at the temple’ (Luke 24:53). Luke begins his second book, *Acts*, with an account of Jesus meeting his apostles (Acts 1:2-4), and goes on to describe a subsequent meeting (1:6: *συνελθόντες*). The implicit subject of verse 12 is clearly the apostles, the ones who returned to Jerusalem after Jesus’ ascension from the Mount of Olives. In addition, verse 13 lists the eleven remaining apostles by name: “Peter, John, James [the sequence in the Majority Text is: Peter, James, John] and Andrew; Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew; James son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot, and Judas son of James.”

The apostles had a regular meeting place in Jerusalem, an upstairs room where they usually stayed (verse 13: τὸ ὑπερῶον; cf. Acts 9:37,39; 20:8). One can think of the time between the Ascension and Pentecost, days of expectation, fulfilled by the coming of the Holy Spirit. Verse 15 marks this period with the words ‘in those days’. It is quite possible that this upstairs room was also where Jesus appeared after his resurrection, on Easter Sunday and the week following. Looking back a little further, we can think of the room where Jesus celebrated the last Passover with his disciples, a guest room somewhere in the city. In the other Gospels, this room is described as a ‘large upper room’ (*ἀνάγαιον μέγα*; Mark 14:15; Luke 22:12), fully furnished, containing at least three sets of couches surrounding a large table. Peter and James

had been given the task of finding the unknown owner of this house, by means of directions Jesus had given them. In this room, apparently a place their Master liked, they had made the necessary preparations for the Passover meal. Had arrangements been made for a longer tenancy of this room, perhaps?

Even though a different terminology is used, this upstairs room in Acts is often identified with the upper storey described in Mark and Luke. It is rather less likely that one ought to think here of a different upstairs room, located somewhere within the temple complex. Indeed, it is not until Acts 2:46 that the temple is first mentioned. The article used in verse 13 could well be used anaphorically, referring to a location already known to the readers of Luke and Acts. Actually, an important historical argument may be advanced for this interpretation: archaeological research has shown that after Jerusalem was destroyed, a synagogue of Christian Jews was built upon the remains of this house. From there, various churches were established in Jerusalem. These days, tour guides point out the Coenaculum (the room of the Last Supper) as being located in a space above the traditional burial place of King David, in a 12th century Crusader church in Jerusalem.¹¹

After Judas' death, eleven of the twelve disciples remained. They are all listed by name in verse 13, beginning with Peter. Luke tells us that this gathering of eleven men 'all joined together constantly in prayer' (the Majority Text has 'prayer *and supplication*', verse 14). This would certainly have included prayer for the promised Holy Spirit. Luke's account shows that this wonderful unity, finding its expression in calling together on the name of God, was characteristic for the Christian community in Jerusalem from the earliest, most tender stages of its existence (Acts 1:14; 2:1; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12).

In verse 14, Luke also records the presence of women. At first glance, the reader would be inclined to think of the women from Galilee, those frequently mentioned by Luke's Gospel as Jesus' most devoted followers. There are, however two clues pointing in a different direction. To begin with, the sentence lacks an article, leading Van Eck to make a point of translating this phrase as: 'with women' rather than 'with the women' or 'with some women'.¹² Nowhere does the book of Acts refer to women from Galilee. Following this, the Western text has added the word 'children' as well as an article, which indicates that the women meant here were also mothers of children. It seems reasonable, then, to think of the wives and children of the men listed by name in the previous verse. It is possible that not all of the apostles were married, but we know that Peter, for instance, took his wife along on his journeys (1 Corinthians 9:5). During the years that Jesus lived and worked on earth they had often, and for extended periods, left their families behind.

¹¹ Bargil Pixner, *Wege des Messias und Stätten der Urkirche. Herausgegeben von Rainer Riesner* (Giessen/Basel: Brunnen Verlag, 1991), 287-326; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "The Cenacle-Topographical Setting for Acts 2:44-45." In *The Book of Acts in Its First-Century Setting. Volume 4: Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 303-321; Bradley Blue, "Acts and the House Church." In *The Book of Acts in Its First-Century Setting. Volume 2: Graeco-Roman Setting*, eds. David W.J. Gill and Conrad Gempf (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 119-222 [134].

¹² John van Eck, *Handelingen. De wereld in het geding* (Commentaar op het Nieuwe Testament; Kampen: Kok, 2003), 43.

Immediately after the Ascension, had the time perhaps come for family reunions?¹³

If we continue this line of thought, verse 14 must be read as listing two separate groups:

- a. the disciples, mentioned by name, together with their wives (and families);
- b. Mary, the mother of Jesus, mentioned by name, together with his brothers and sisters.

The physically absent Jesus, taken up into heavenly glory, brings these two core groups together. For both groups he forms the spiritual centre. The first group consists of his disciples and their immediate families; the second group is made up of his own immediate family: his mother, brothers and sisters.

This, it should be noted, is the last reference to Mary in the New Testament. She receives a place of honour among those remaining in Jerusalem, but increasingly steps back into the shadow of her ascended Son, eventually disappearing from view altogether. In verse 14, Mary is recorded as the mother of Jesus. Her Son, physically absent, but explicitly present in the text through his mother, is the real central character of this account. It was he who had arranged for this meeting place; it was he who had commanded his followers to go back to Jerusalem, and to await there what was to happen next.

Starting in verse 15, a larger group of disciples comes onto the scene. The text gives us no reason to think of a different location. Apparently, the meeting place is still the same house, but an upper room would not have provided enough space to accommodate them all. Might they have perhaps begun to use the whole house (cf. Acts 2:2)? Luke relates how Peter began to speak, amid 'the brothers' (*ἀδελφοί* in the Nestle-Aland edition, also the NIV and the ESV) or 'the disciples' (*μαθηταί*, as in the Western Text and in the Majority Text). The former highlights their relationship to each other: this group belongs to a spiritual family. This is the first time they are referred to as such in Acts. The latter focuses on their relationship to Jesus: this group is a gathering of his followers. This would connect well with the language usage of Luke and Acts. One way or the other, this marks the first beginnings of a congregation in Jerusalem.

As such, the reader is shown a fellowship including Jesus' disciples, together with their families, along with all other disciples, in the broadest sense, both male and female. Verse 23 mentions two more by name: Joseph Barsabbas and Matthias. This situation is reflected in an expression found twice in Luke's Gospel: 'the Eleven and [all] those with them' (Luke 24:9,33).

7. A communion of saints

In Acts 9:31, the oldest manuscripts have 'church' (*ἐκκλησία*) in the singular. This can be explained by the Greek expression that follows: *καθ' ὅλης*¹⁴; the 'catholic'

¹³ For the Western text of the book of Acts, see Josep Rius-Camps and Jenny Read-Heimerdinger, *The Message of Acts in Codex Bezae. A Comparison with the Alexandrian Tradition. Volume 1: Acts 1.1-5.42: Jerusalem* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004). For comparison they point to Acts 21:5: Paul was being escorted by the Christians from Tyre, along with [their] wives and children.

¹⁴ In the New Testament, the expression *καθ' ὅλης* is only used by Luke in his gospel (4:14; 8:39; 23:5) and in the Book of Acts (9:31,42; 10:37), and only here he connects it to the term *ἐκκλησία*.

church of Jerusalem extends across a much larger area than the holy city itself, for it can be found in Judea, Samaria and even in the previously unmentioned Galilee.¹⁵ Jerusalem is the mother church, spread over the country of Israel, as the result of the testimony of the apostles (Acts 1:8). In addition, Christian Jews travelled abroad, to bear witness across the diaspora of what God had brought about in Jerusalem (they are recorded as travelling to Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch; Acts 11:19). It is to these people that James, the brother of the Lord, wrote his diasporic letter, to be followed later by the letter of his younger brother Jude. James' address says: "To the twelve tribes scattered among the nations" (James 1:1).

Peter's apostolic work is often underrated, according to Hengel. Not only was he a passionate preacher; he also capably organized the church and acted as a missionary strategist. Unlike Paul, Peter does not revisit churches he has already planted. Instead, his journey to Samaria is followed by a circuit through the plain of Sharon and visits to the chief Jewish cities of the region: Lydda and Joppa.¹⁶ There, he meets 'the saints' (Acts 9:32,41), an expression generally used for the believers in Jerusalem, sanctified by the Spirit (Acts 9:13; 26:10, cf. Revelation 20:9 and Paul's reference in Romans 15:25-26, 31). Peter, then, was visiting the outlying districts of the one church of Jerusalem. Within the church, there was great encouragement, thanks to the healings he performed in Lydda and Joppa. Outside the church, the effect of Peter's visit was that those who lived in Sharon turned to the Lord. This provides an interesting early example of missionary activity among Jewish people.¹⁷

8. Antioch, the daughter church

The second Christian church only comes into existence when the people of Antioch become acquainted with the gospel of Jesus Christ. This happens when men from Cyprus and Cyrene, some of those who had been scattered by the persecution in Jerusalem, come into contact with the Greek inhabitants of Antioch (probably beginning with those among them who were 'God-fearing').

Again, the church in Jerusalem keeps a close eye on this development. When the news of what has happened reaches them, they wish, just as in Samaria, to retain control of events. This time, it is Barnabas, a bridge-builder *par excellence*,¹⁸ who is sent to investigate. Barnabas, tells Luke, was a good man and full of faith,

¹⁵ In reading the plural 'churches' along with plural verb forms, the Majority Text differs from all other textual sources, with the exception of a small number of early translations. The singular form is used throughout Acts (Acts 5:11; 8:1,3; 11:22; 12:1; 15:4,22; 18:22; cf. James 5:14). See K.N. Giles, "Luke's Use of the Term 'ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ' with Special Reference to Acts 20.28 and 9.31," *New Testament Studies* 31 (1985): 135-142. The preferred reading by Giles himself, however, is a subject in the singular and the last verb in the plural.

¹⁶ Martin Hengel, "The Geography of Palestine in Acts." In *The Book of Acts in its First Century Setting. Volume 4: Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1995), 27-78; idem, *Der unterschätzte Petrus. Zwei Studien* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 148.

¹⁷ Joachim Gnillka, *Petrus und Rom. Das Petrusbild in den ersten zwei Jahrhunderten* (Freiburg: Herder, 2002), 86-88.

¹⁸ Markus Öhler, *Barnabas. Die historische Person und ihre Rezeption in der Apostelgeschichte* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 486: "Barnabas war damit die vermittelnde Persönlichkeit des frühen Christentums".

well trusted by the church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:24). Having his own roots on the island of Cyprus (Acts 4:36), he was the right person to assess what the Cypriot and Cyrenian brothers had achieved in Antioch. On his arrival, Barnabas encouraged (παρεκάλει) them all to persevere and to remain true to the Lord. Barnabas was also the one who introduced Saul – just as he had previously done in Jerusalem – to the church in Antioch. By a spontaneous process, this was where believers are first called Χριστιανοί (Acts 11:26b; cf. Acts 26:28 and I Peter 4:14): here, the Christians, disciples of Christ, form an independent community.

From that time onwards, the mother church in Jerusalem co-existed alongside a daughter church in Antioch consisting not only of Jewish but also Gentile Christians (this is also an instance of ἐκκλησία being used in the singular: Acts 11:26; 13:1; 14:27; 15:3). This daughter church, it seems, was led by prophets and teachers, five of whom (just as the Twelve and the Seven) are mentioned by their full names: Barnabas, Simeon Niger, Lucius the Cyrenian, Manaen, and Saul (Acts 13:1). Increasingly, the daughter church in Antioch begins to show marks of adulthood, and eventually becomes an independent church, full of missionary vigour.¹⁹

What was the relationship between the mother church in Jerusalem and her independent daughter in Antioch? There was always a risk that they would grow apart. Each had its own character: Jerusalem was exclusively Jewish, while Antioch was also partly Gentile. In Acts 11-15, Luke repeatedly points out that these two Christian churches, intimately woven together by a common past, consciously aimed to find a way together once the work of mission among the nations began to expand.

Further to this, delegations were sometimes sent from the one church to the other. A number of prophets travelled from Jerusalem to Antioch to pass on their message, or to deliver and further explain a letter. Antioch provided financial help to Jerusalem for the support of brothers and sisters during a period of famine. Antioch, not Jerusalem, became the home base for Paul's missionary journeys: even though Paul was not from the church in Jerusalem, some of his first missionary colleagues certainly were (Barnabas, John Mark and Silas; see also Acts 11:22,27; 12:25; 13:4-5; 15:22,40).²⁰ Mission work among the Gentiles, therefore, was not a typically Antiochian enterprise; it remained anchored in the mother church in Jerusalem.

9. James and the elders

With Peter's departure, the leadership of the church in Jerusalem fell to James. In the New Testament, he appears more than once as a church leader (Acts 12:17; Galatians 1:19, James 1:1). This brings to the fore a category of men less well-known

¹⁹ About the origins of Christianity in Antioch, see Wayne A. Meeks and Robert L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch. In the First Four Centuries of the Common Era* (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), 13-16; Magnus Zetterholm, *The formation of Christianity in Antioch. A social-scientific approach to the separation between Judaism and Christianity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003); Paul Barnett, *The Birth of Christianity. The First Twenty Years* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), chapter 8 ["Christians" in Antioch]. Barnett also discusses the list of five names in Acts 13:1. It is perhaps no coincidence that this list starts with Barnabas and ends with Saul.

²⁰ See Richard Bauckham, "James and the Jerusalem Church." In *The Book of Acts in Its First-Century Setting. Volume 4: Palestinian Setting*, ed. Richard Bauckham (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 415-480 [434]. Barnabas and Saul even worked together for one year, preaching and teaching at Antioch (Acts 11:26).

than the apostles: the brothers of the Lord. That said, the New Testament does tell us something of the role played by Jesus' blood relatives in the New Testament church.

At the beginning, Jesus' own brothers did not believe in him (John 7:5). It seems, however, that his appearance as the risen Lord, especially to James, brought about a change in their attitude (1 Corinthians 15:7). Together with their mother Mary, Jesus' brothers formed part of the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 1:14). Later, next to the apostles, the Lord's brothers played an active part in the proclamation of the gospel. It appears that James, the eldest, remained in Jerusalem, while the younger brothers Joses, Simon and Jude (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3) are believed to have made missionary journeys of their own. In contrast to Paul, however, they were accompanied by their wives, who themselves belonged to the believers (1 Corinthians 9:5).²¹

In addition, two letters in the New Testament canon, sent to Jewish Christians, have the names of Jesus' brothers in their address: a diasporic letter by James himself, and a follow up letter, written by his brother Jude. Neither of them, however, presents himself as the Lord's brother; rather, each presents himself as the Lord's servant. Jesus is our Lord and Master, no less (James 1:1; Jude :4).

The devout lifestyle of James, who daily prostrated himself in the temple to plead for forgiveness for his people, evoked such respect that he became known as 'the righteous' (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* II 1, 2-5; 23, 4-7). He was indeed a *tsaddiq* in the fullest sense of the word. As Jerusalem was regarded as the mother church for all of Christianity, James was held in high esteem even well outside the boundaries of the holy land (cf. Galatians 2:12).

The *Gospel of Thomas* contains an apocryphal saying of Jesus, which could well be taken as a witness to the universally respected righteousness of the brother of the Lord. When the disciples wondered who should become their leader after Jesus left them, he is supposed to have said: "Wherever you are, you are to go to James the righteous, for whose sake heaven and earth came into being". What the rabbis said about the Torah, applied to James also, throughout the world.

After James' violent death, he was succeeded as leader in the church of Jerusalem by another of Jesus' relatives: Simeon, the son of Cl(e)opas, known as one of the travellers on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:18; John 19:25). Hegesippus describes Clopas as the brother of Joseph, Mary's husband. If that is correct, Simeon was a Jesus' full cousin (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* III 11; IV 22,4).²² In addition, two of Jude's grandsons, arrested by Domitian because of their Davidic ancestry and later released, played an important role in early Jewish Christianity.

The bishop's seat, the symbol of James' position as leader, was an object of interest, right up to Eusebius' day. From the quotation below, it is clear that in the

²¹ Eusebius quotes Clement of Alexandria in order to prove that marriage is not objectionable, as some apostles themselves were married, for example Philip and Peter (*Ecclesiastical History* III 20,1-2). Eusebius, however, sometimes seems to confuse the apostle Philip with Philip the evangelist.

²² The name Clopas is a rare Semitic variant of the Greek name Cleopas, so rare that Cleopas from Luke 24:18 is often identified with Clopas from John 21:25. In that case, he was married to Mary, who was an aunt of Jesus by marriage and one of the four women at the foot of the cross. Why could she not be the second, anonymous, disciple walking to Emmaus? See further, Richard Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990).

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first centuries of church history, the Holy See was not in Rome, but in Jerusalem:

Now the throne of James, who was the first to receive from the Saviour and the apostles the episcopate of the church at Jerusalem, who also, as the divine books show, was called a brother of Christ, has been preserved to this day; and by the honour that the brethren in succession there pay to it, they show clearly to all the reverence in which the holy men were and still are held by the men of old time and those of our day, because of the love shown them by God (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* VII 19).

Nevertheless, we do not get the impression from the book of Acts that after the apostles' departure, the leadership of the church narrowed to one person. In the company of James, a number of elders suddenly appears (Acts 11:30; 21:18). Already at the convent in Jerusalem, they are mentioned in the same breath as the apostles (Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22-23).

In contrast to the Seven (Acts 6:5-6), or the elders of the Pauline congregations, we do not read of a particular moment when these elders were chosen or appointed. It seems that these men were not elders in the sense that they had been put forward from within the churches. Their authority was self-evident. They derived it from the life experience that came with being an older member, in this case from their special first-hand experience of having known Jesus Christ personally, and of having been sent out by him (perhaps as one of the Seventy: Luke 10:1-20).

Hence, the almost automatic connection between these elders and the apostles. Van Bruggen compares their position in Jerusalem with that of the elders of Israel, the ones who had witnessed the entry into the land of Canaan, and who had outlived Joshua. After Joshua's death, these men remained as living eyewitnesses of what God had done for Israel (Joshua 24:31; Judges 2:7).²³ Similarly, the elders in Jerusalem were living eyewitnesses of what God had done in Israel through Jesus Christ, his own Son.

These eldest disciples of Jesus formed a college, of which, so to speak, James was the chairman. Within the church of Jerusalem, 'James and the elders' have a position of authority, as the Book of Acts shows. They direct the diaconal funds collected for the church (Acts 11:30). During the Jerusalem convent the elders, with James as their spokesman, stand beside the apostles. The decision of this convent, as described in Acts 15, has been of immeasurable value for the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians: one need not be a Jew in order to belong to the God of Israel. Later, the elders gathered around James to receive Paul and his companions. Indeed, their joint declaration is then expressed in the first person plural: 'we' (Acts 21:18-25).²⁴

If Bauckham is correct, the early Christian tradition has preserved the names

²³ J. van Bruggen, *Ambten in de apostolische kerk. Een exegetisch mozaïek* (Kampen: Kok, 1980), 78-91.

²⁴ Several other interpretations of the role of James and the elders in the Jerusalem church have been proposed. Campbell believes that elders is another term for the apostles, used by Luke from the moment that they appear as witnesses less than as leaders of the church. How should one think of James? According to Campbell, James took over the role of Jesus. Bauckham thinks that the Twelve, when they fell apart after the death of James and the departure of Peter, gradually became included within the circle of elders. But at the convent of Jerusalem, the apostles are still a group besides the elders.

of the elders of Jerusalem.²⁵ In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius lists fifteen Jewish overseers, continuing up to Hadrian's campaign after the Bar Kochba revolt. The list begins with James, the brother of the Lord. Then follow Simeon and Justus, after which one finds another twelve names. The number fifteen seems rather artificial, as Eusebius later lists another fifteen Gentile overseers, for a round total of thirty. Eusebius explanation for the large number, that they each lived for only a short period, is hardly convincing, particularly since it is known that Simeon lived to a very old age.²⁶ It is far more likely that the overseers listed did not succeed each other, but were each other's contemporaries, sharing the leadership of the church in Jerusalem.

If we regard Simeon and Justus as James' direct successors, we are left with precisely twelve: Zaccheus, Tobias, Benjamin, John, Matthias, Philip, Seneca, Justus, Levi, Ephres, Joseph and Jude. These twelve men are likely to have formed the college of elders who, together with James, gave leadership to the church of Jerusalem.²⁷

Part III: the bounty of Jerusalem

10. Jerusalem distributes its bounty

In the second book of his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius recounts the events that took place after the ascension of Jesus Christ, giving particular attention to those in the church at Jerusalem. His third book then begins as follows:

Such was the condition of things among the Jews, but the holy Apostles and disciples of our Saviour were scattered throughout the whole world. Thomas, as a tradition relates, obtained by lot Parthia, Andrew Scythia, John Asia (and he stayed there and died in Ephesus), but Peter seems to have preached to the Jews of the Dispersion in Pontus and Galatia and Bithynia, Cappadocia, and Asia, and at the end he came to Rome and was crucified head downwards, for so he had demanded to suffer. What need be said of Paul, who fulfilled the gospel of Christ from Jerusalem to Illyria and afterward was martyred in Rome under Nero? This is stated exactly by Origen in the third volume of his commentary on Genesis (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* III 1,1-3).

In drawing on this tradition, Eusebius here aims to give an insight into the worldwide spread of the apostolic proclamation. The movement went from Jerusalem to all points of the compass, with Rome becoming the new centre of the world. This tradition, according to which Thomas, Andrew and John were each assigned a region, ought not to be understood as if the apostles, by mutual agreement, divided their areas of labour; rather, it points to a divine appointment of their tasks from heaven (Greek: *εἰλήχεν*, meaning 'received by lot'). Eusebius wants to show how the emissaries and disciples of Jesus Christ, through their missionary journeys, gave concrete form to

²⁵ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* IV 5,3; V 12,1-2. Richard Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 70-79 [The Jerusalem Bishops List].

²⁶ According to Hegesippus, Simeon died as a martyr at the age of 120 (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* III 32,3.6)

²⁷ When James advises the gravely ill to call in the 'elders of the church' (James 5:14), he probably has the elders of Jerusalem in mind.

the world-wide spread of the Gospel. This is how both Peter and Paul found their way to Rome: neither had planned their missionary itineraries, but both were led by the hand of God. The other traditions, of greatly varying quality and often largely beyond verification, are not inconsistent with this general picture.²⁸

The tradition that Eusebius draws on shows that while Paul may be considered the best-known of missionary apostles, he is certainly not the only one to have made such journeys. Geographical details of Peter's activities among the Jewish diaspora are no doubt based on the address of Peter's first letter (1 Peter 1:1). The letter itself, however, leaves the impression that other preachers had been active in Asia Minor (1 Peter 1:12), while Peter himself stayed in Babylon (1 Peter 5:13). He is also known to have travelled to Antioch, as is seen in his confrontation with Paul there (Galatians 2:11).

In addition there are three indications that the apostle Peter, perhaps accompanied by his wife, is likely to have visited the city of Corinth. In the first place, it was Peter who had fanatical supporters in Corinth – a true 'Cephas party' (1 Corinthians 1:12). Secondly, Paul uses the example of Cephas to demonstrate to the Corinthians that apostles had every right to take their believing wives along on their journeys, even though Paul himself does not do so (1 Corinthians 9:5). Thirdly, Dionysius, the bishop of Corinth, writes a century later that both Peter and Paul were involved in the establishment of the church at Corinth. Both apostles, Dionysius records, have 'planted' in Corinth, and have given further instruction there as well (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* II 25,8).²⁹

It seems clear that the church at Jerusalem resembled a bursting seed pod. The seed of the gospel scattered across the face of the earth. Twelve plus one sowers knew themselves called to take the lead. Although it is true that this scattering of seed was done first by the emissaries and disciples of Jesus Christ, beginning in Jerusalem and spreading throughout the world, this activity was not limited to them. Jesus' brothers and other passionate preachers took an active part in this proclamation of the gospel. The power of the Holy Spirit set an immense missionary movement in motion. In this way the church of Jerusalem, where everything began on the day of Pentecost, became a truly catholic church in the full meaning of the word: universal, a Christian community of faith that – spiritually – extended all over the world. This global catholic church has its roots, not in Rome, but in Jerusalem.

²⁸ Of the apostles, Thaddeus, for instance, is said to have found his way to Edessa, in Syria, and Thomas to India. Bartholomew has also been mentioned in connection with India. After Peter's death in Rome, Mark departed for Egypt, where he, according to the tradition, became the bishop of Alexandria. According to a Cypriot tradition, Lazarus, after his resurrection, and fearful of an attempt to murder him (John 12:9-11), fled to Cyprus and later became bishop of Citium. Epiphanius records that Lazarus lived in Cyprus for another thirty years after his resurrection. Later sources tell that Barnabas, who was a Cypriot by birth (Acts 4:36), later returned to the island and lived there until his death.

²⁹ The imagery of Dionysius is probably taken from 1 Corinthians 3:5-9. See further: C.K. Barrett, *Essays on Paul* (London: SPCK, 1982), chapter 2 [Cephas and Corinth]; Martin Hengel, *Der unterschätzte Petrus. Zwei Studien* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006), 106-111; 167-189; 204-217. For a reconstruction of Peter's apostolic activities: P.H.R. van Houwelingen, *1 Petrus. Rondzendbrief uit Babylon* (Commentaar op het Nieuwe Testament; Kampen: Kok, 1991; Forth, Revised Edition 2010), 38-41.

11. Seven Catholic Epistles

'Catholic Epistles' (or 'General Epistles', as they are sometimes referred to,) is the collective term for a group of seven letters that bear the names of their authors only, and not those to whom they were addressed. Traditionally, these letters are ascribed to James, Peter, John and Jude. In some later manuscripts, the word 'καθολικός' was sometimes added to their superscription. Hence, the catholic epistle of James, etc. Many modern commentaries and introductions do not deal with these letters as a unified whole; instead, after covering the gospels, the Pauline epistles and the Johannine writings, they assume that what remains is a random assortment of left-over letters. At the time of the fourth century church fathers, however, published lists of the canon grouped these as a collection of seven so-called Catholic Epistles, each of them identified by name.³⁰

The manuscript tradition of the New Testament displays a remarkable phenomenon in relation to these letters. In the great majority of manuscripts, they immediately follow the book of Acts, before the Pauline letters, even. We see this in the codex Alexandrinus, the codex Vaticanus, the codex Ephraemi Rescriptus as well as in the Majority Text. The book of Acts and the Catholic Epistles have a very close connection.³¹ In the Greek canon we see the same thing. It is only under the influence of the Latin tradition (as laid down in the text of the Vulgate) that the Pauline letters precede the Catholic Epistles for the first time. Bearing in mind that the attention of the Western European reformers was largely directed towards Paul's instruction concerning justification by faith, it must be said that in the study of the New Testament, the Catholic Epistles have often been overshadowed by the letters of Paul.³²

In the fourth century, when describing the death of James, the brother of the Lord, Eusebius mentions seven missionary letters. The first of these was written by James; his brother Jude is also understood to have written one of these seven. There were some doubts about James. These did not seemingly concern its content, as it was freely used in the churches. There was, however, a lingering degree of uncertainty as to its authorship. The ancient authors consulted by Eusebius could provide no definite answer to this question, nor about the letter of Jude. Nonetheless, and after some initial hesitation, the churches accepted the authenticity of the seven Catholic Epistles, and with that the recognition of James as author. Eusebius writes as follows:

³⁰ Cyril, Epiphanius, Athanasius, Jerome, Gregory. See <http://www.bible-researcher.com/canon8.html>.

³¹ It is true that in the codex Sinaiticus and in a number of minuscules the book of Acts is placed between the Pauline letters and the Catholic Epistles, but that does not detract from this connection. See further: Bruce M. Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament. Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), appendix II: Variations in the Sequence of the Books of the New Testament; David Trobisch, *Die Endredaktion des Neuen Testaments. Eine Untersuchung zur Entstehung der christlichen Bibel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 35-57; D.C. Parker, *An Introduction to the New Testament Manuscripts and Their Texts* (Cambridge: University Press, 2008), 283-310.

³² The codex Alexandrinus nicely shows how the letter of Jude was regarded as the conclusion of the book of Acts plus the Catholic Epistles. On the last page of Jude, the manuscript displays a flowery decoration, with this caption: *The epistle of Jude. The acts of the holy apostles and the Catholic [Epistles]* (ΙΟΥΔΑ ΕΠΙΣΤΟΛΗ. ΠΡΑΞΕΙΣ ΤΩΝ ΑΓΙΩΝ ΑΠΟΣΤΟΛΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΚΑΘΟΛΙΚΑΙ). The next page begins with Paul's letter to the Romans.

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Such is the story of James, whose is said to be the first of the Epistles called Catholic. It is to be observed that its authenticity is denied, since few of the ancients quote it, as is also the case with the Epistle called Jude's, which is itself one of the seven called Catholic; nevertheless we know that these letters have been used publicly with the rest in most churches (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* II 23,24-25).

Elsewhere, Eusebius notes that Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150-215 AD) provided a brief commentary on all the canonical books, including the letter of Jude and the other Catholic Epistles (*Ecclesiastical History* VI 14,5). This document itself has been lost, but a Latin translation of Clement's commentary on 1 Peter, 1 and 2 John, and Jude has been preserved. This ancient Bible commentary from Egypt most probably already gave attention to the Catholic Epistles.

From this, three tentative conclusions may be drawn. First, the expression 'Catholic Epistles' has been the term for a specific group of seven letters, which originated in the apostolic period. Secondly, there was some debate regarding the authenticity of at least two of them; apparently, there was some doubt concerning their authorship. In the case of James and Jude, as mentioned by Eusebius, this is likely because the author does not identify himself as an apostle. However, with regard to James, there was also a larger problem: a number of apocryphal writings were in circulation, purportedly under his name (the *Infancy Gospel of James*, the *Apocryphon of James*, and the *First and Second Revelations of James*). Thirdly, in spite of the margin of uncertainty concerning their authorship, both of these letters were freely used in the churches. This is to say that just as with all the other authoritative writings, they were read aloud throughout the world as accepted parts of the church liturgy.

There is, therefore, every reason for a re-evaluation of this collection of letters. Indeed, this is all the more so, as it enables us – in the words of the 20th century New Testament scholar J. de Zwaan of Leiden University – to better distinguish the range of voices that speak to us from the New Testament.³³ Schlosser believes that we are dealing with a homogenous corpus, while Wall has demonstrated that the seven Catholic Epistles are not just a random collection, but as to their content form a coherent whole.³⁴ Be that as it may, the collection of seven Catholic Epistles forms a precious possession of faith for the worldwide church.

What exactly does the name 'Catholic Epistles' signify? In what respect are they general? This is commonly understood to mean 'generally recognised' or 'generally distributed'. Already at an early date, there would have been the realisation that these letters were not specifically intended for one church, but were meant for the worldwide church as a whole. This explanation, however, is not altogether convincing. To

³³ J. de Zwaan, *Inleiding tot het Nieuwe Testament* III (Haarlem: Bohn, 1948), 14-15. The 52nd Colloquium Biblicum Lovaniense (2003) was dedicated to the Catholic Epistles. See *The Catholic Epistles and the Tradition*, ed. J. Schlosser (Leuven: Peeters, 2004).

³⁴ Robert W. Wall, "A Unifying Theology of the Catholic Epistles. A Canonical Approach." In *The Catholic Epistles and the Tradition*, ed. J. Schlosser (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 43-71. His claim that the letters of Jude and James function as a literary framework of the collection (50) is dubious, because the sequence is that of length, letters of the same author being combined (Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament*, 299-300).

begin with, the development of the canon implies that *all* of the New Testament writings are of importance for the whole of the Christian Church. The Pauline Epistles, for example, were also read in other churches. In addition, some of these Catholic Epistles really do have specific addressees, as is evident from their prefaces. James is written to the twelve tribes in the diaspora, 1 Peter to Christians in a number of specifically designated regions in Asia Minor, 2 John to a specific but not explicitly identified sister-church, and 3 John to the ‘beloved brother Gaius’, the leader of a specific church.

It is worth considering whether the catholicity of the letters does not have more to do with the catholicity of Jerusalem (Acts 9:31, see section 7 of this article). All their authors, after all, had come from the mother church in the holy city. As such, it could be said that these letters document the catholic mission movement that went out from Jerusalem. James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, was the Lord’s brother. The same was true of his younger sibling Jude. Peter and John (assuming that John is ‘the elder’ identified as the author of two of the Johannine letters) were close companions, who played an important role in the early days of the church. It is through these ‘catholic’ men, apostles and brothers of the Lord, fully involved in the proclamation of the gospel that proceeded from Jerusalem, that the close connection between the book of Acts and these seven Catholic Epistles can be easily explained as well. The chief characters in Acts developed as authors of the church.

However, something else must also be taken into account. In Galatians 2:9, in connection with his earlier visit to Jerusalem, Paul describes James, Cephas (Peter) and John as ‘pillars [στῦλοι] of the church’. The priority is important: James comes first. He was not an apostle, but he was the leader of the church in Jerusalem. It is perhaps no coincidence that Paul lists their names in exactly the same order in which six of the seven Catholic Epistles are passed on to us in the canon. They came from the three pillars of Jerusalem, the three most prominent members of the mother church, who, for just that reason, were regarded as authority figures throughout the Christian world.³⁵ A seventh document, a short letter from Jude, has been added to the other six. This is presumably because the author introduces himself as the brother of James, and also because he makes use of material from Peter’s second letter.³⁶

Thus, seven Catholic Epistles were sent into the world: written material from the circle of the pillars of Jerusalem; documentation of the ecumenical movement that proceeded from the mother church in Jerusalem. What follows is a brief description of each of the seven letters.³⁷

³⁵ David R. Nienhuis, *Not by Paul Alone. The Formation of the Catholic Epistle Collection and the Christian Canon* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007), 88. However, Nienhuis claims that the letter of James is pseudepigraphical, dating from the second century and intended to introduce the collection of Catholic Epistles into the canon. See also Jacques Schlosser, “Le corpus des Épîtres catholiques.” In *The Catholic Epistles and the Tradition*, ed. J. Schlosser (Leuven: Peeters, 2004), 3-41[18-20]. However, Schlosser considers the epistolary character of these letters to be fictitious.

³⁶ P.H.R. van Houwelingen, “The Authenticity of 2 Peter: Problems and Possible Solutions,” *European Journal of Theology* 19.2 (2010): 119-129 [123].

³⁷ Summarising the material from *Apostelen. Draggers van een spraakmakend evangelie*, ed. P.H.R. van Houwelingen (CNT; Kampen: Kok, 2011), chapter 3. James D.G. Dunn limits – without arguing his case – the legacy of what he calls the first generation Christian leaders to three documents, independently

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Catholic Epistle 1: The diasporic letter of James, the brother of the Lord.

As has already been noted, this letter is addressed to refugees from the Jewish-Christian church of Jerusalem. The 'twelve tribes' mentioned in the address clearly do not refer to a Christian diaspora, but to the tribal relationships of Israel, in which the Christian believers had their roots. James follows a Jerusalem tradition of letters, full of instructions and advices, aimed at Jews living in the diaspora. He acts as a teacher of wisdom, in the style of Jesus himself. It is likely that this letter of exhortation was written before the convent in Jerusalem, and before the mission to the Gentiles began.

Catholic Epistle 2: Peter's circular letter from Babylon.

Peter, having fled Jerusalem, had gone to 'another place' (Acts 12:17). This place was not Rome, as is often thought. This idea is based on the book of Revelation, where Rome is compared with Babylon. However, the Babylon referred to at the end of 1 Peter denotes an actual place. To ensure that Herod could not find him, the apostle had to leave the territory of the Roman Empire. For that reason, he went to Babylon in Mesopotamia, where there was a Jewish community. From there he writes to Gentile Christians in Asia Minor, living in all regions of the address, arranged in an imaginary circle. Silas delivered this letter and provided further elucidation.

Catholic Epistle 3: The testament of Simon Peter.

As he felt the end of his life approaching, Peter wrote a second letter to the same readers as its precursor, a spiritual last will and testament. He warns against false teachers, who will try to turn back the clock on their Christian identity. Let no-one think that God will leave this evil unpunished. In the same manner as the world was once engulfed in a deluge of water, so the Almighty will carry out his last judgement with all-consuming fire. Isaiah's ancient promise will then be fulfilled: "we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness." (2 Peter 3:13)

Catholic Epistles 4, 5 and 6: Church mail from the eldest witness (John).

The author of the second and third letters of John refers to himself as 'the elder'. He is almost certainly the apostle John, the longest surviving witness to the resurrection (John 21:23). It is likely that the first letter was intended to commit to writing his apostolic witness to his own congregation. From his second and third letters, it is clear that John had intentions to visit a sister church. In order to ensure that he should be well received, he informs both the congregation (2 John) and its leader, Gaius (3 John), of his impending arrival.

Catholic Epistle 7: The testament of Jude, the brother of James.

Jude's letter is one long and varied list of examples from Israel's history (from both the Old Testament and Jewish tradition) providing documentary evidence that the wicked will not avoid their punishment: their sentence has long ago been determined and written down. Even though Jude's letter bears strong resemblance to 2 Peter 2,

discussed by him: the letter to the Ephesians (according to Dunn written by a pupil of Paul), the letter of James and the first letter of Peter (*Beginning from Jerusalem* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 1105-1166).

his readers are probably Jewish, rather than Gentile, Christians. Besides, Jude was not one of the apostles. He points to them, and identifies himself as James' brother. James was put to death in 62 AD; this may be his spiritual testament, written on his behalf by his younger brother Jude.

12. The Jerusalem perspective of Hebrews and Revelation

There are good reasons to suppose that the letter to the Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians who had come from Jerusalem.³⁸ Eusebius recounts that they were able to flee from Jerusalem just before the Roman conquest from where they went to Pella, a Hellenistic city across the Jordan, about one hundred kilometres to the northeast.³⁹ The letter to the Hebrews is intended to encourage these believers. It reminds that they have no lasting city here, and accordingly exhorts them not to become fixated on the earthly Jerusalem. Instead, they are to fix their eyes on the Jerusalem above, the city of the future (Hebrews 13:14). Furthermore, it provides the reminder that their High Priest has entered the heavenly sanctuary and has brought about eternal reconciliation. Upon this basis, it asserts that the cultic sacrifices of the present Jerusalem have come to an end. The letter to the Hebrews is a 'word of encouragement' (λόγος τῆς παρακλήσεως; Hebrews 13:22), that builds stylistically on a form of preaching that was common in the synagogues. An ancient tradition suggests that the anonymous author of Hebrews may have been Barnabas, who was certainly no stranger in Jerusalem. The apostles had given him the surname 'son of encouragement' (υἱὸς παρακλήσεως; Acts 4:36).

The significance of the book of Revelation for the Jerusalem perspective becomes especially clear towards its end: John, exiled to the island of Patmos, sees a new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven.⁴⁰ From the throne in heaven a voice resounds: "I am making everything new!" (Revelation 21:5). God's dwelling place is not restricted to the people of Israel, as it was before. It is now 'with people' (μετὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων; Revelation 21:3). When the new city is measured, it is revealed to be as wide as the whole world. Its gates are invitingly open to all directions of the compass, and those who would be its inhabitants stream towards it. But not everyone is welcome in the city (Revelation 21:8, 27; 22:15): this welcome is extended only to those who honour and serve God. In the cityscape of the future, the proud temple of the past is no longer to be seen. God himself has become the temple of the new Jerusalem, together with the Lamb. The paradise curse has been lifted (Revelation 22:3) so that there is now ample space within which the blessing of God can abound. "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates of the city" (Revelation 22:14). Jerusalem truly does become a holy world metropolis!

³⁸ P.H.R. van Houwelingen, "Riddles around the letter to the Hebrews," *Fides Reformata* XVI.2 (2011): 151-162.

³⁹ P.H.R. van Houwelingen, "Fleeing Forward: The Departure of Christians from Jerusalem to Pella," *Westminster Theological Journal* 65.2 (2003): 181-200. For actual information about the excavations at Pella, see <http://sydney.edu.au/arts/sophi/neaf/excavations/index.shtml>.

⁴⁰ P.H.R. van Houwelingen, "The Book of Revelation: Full of Expectation," *Sárospataki Füzetek* 15.1 (2011): 11-19; "Paradise Motifs in the Book of Revelation," *Sárospataki Füzetek* 15.4 (2011): 11-25.

Abstracts

Jerusalem, the Mother Church

The development of the apostolic church from the perspective of Jerusalem

Describing the apostolic period from the perspective of Jerusalem is a challenge, but if it is true that the church of Jerusalem is the mother church of all Christians, it will be worth the effort.

This article has three parts.

To begin with, the centrality of Jerusalem during the apostolic period is highlighted, paying special attention to the written sources, and taking into consideration that Jerusalem, the holy city, was the spiritual heart of the whole world.

Following this, the article looks at the development of Jerusalem after Pentecost; with the northward flight of many Jewish-Christian believers as a result of Stephen's death by stoning, the mother church gained a daughter in Antioch.

Finally, Jerusalem is explored as the mother church that distributed a number of letters to its children: as a collection, the seven so-called 'Catholic Epistles' document the missionary progress that moved outward from Jerusalem. The Jerusalem perspective of two other non-Pauline New Testament books – Hebrews and Revelation – will also be considered.

Thus, an overall picture of the development of the apostolic church from the perspective of Jerusalem is built up.

Jeruzalem, de moederkerk

De ontwikkeling van de apostolische kerk vanuit het Jeruzalem-perspectief

Jeruzalem was, zou men kunnen zeggen, de moederkerk van heel de christenheid. Daar gebeurde het allemaal op de allereerste Pinksterdag. Het is dan ook een uitdaging de apostolische periode te beschrijven vanuit het Jeruzalem-perspectief.

Dit artikel neemt drie stappen.

Allereerst zal de centraliteit van Jeruzalem tijdens de apostolische periode worden belicht, met aparte aandacht voor de schriftelijke bronnen. Jeruzalem, de heilige stad, is immers geestelijk gesproken het hart van heel de wereld.

Vervolgens kijken we naar de ontwikkeling van Jeruzalem vanaf Pinksteren; de moederkerk kreeg, nadat vele Joods-christelijke gelovigen naar het noorden waren gevlucht als gevolg van de steniging van Stefanus, een dochtergemeente in Antiochië.

Tenslotte gaat het over de uitdelende moederkerk: de zeven zogeheten Katholieke Brieven documenteren als collectie de zendingsbeweging vanuit Jeruzalem. Ook van twee andere niet-paulinische geschriften uit het Nieuwe Testament, de brief aan de Hebreëen en het boek Openbaring, zal de betekenis voor het Jeruzalem-perspectief worden meegenomen. Zo ontstaat een schetsmatig beeld van de ontwikkeling van de apostolische kerk vanuit het Jeruzalem-perspectief.

Jeruzsálem, az anyagyülekezet

Az apostoli egyház fejlődése Jeruzsálem szemszögéből

Az apostoli kor leírása a jeruzsálemi gyülekezet szemszögéből nem könnyű feladat. De ha igaz, hogy e gyülekezet az egész keresztyénség anyagyülekezete, akkor ez megéri a fáradságot. Ez a cikk a fent említett feladatot három lépésben végzi el.

Először hangsúlyozza a jeruzsálemi gyülekezet központi jellegét az apostolok korában. Külön figyelmet fordít az írott forrásokra és arra a tényre, hogy Jeruzsálem, a szent város, az egész világ lelki szíve volt.

Másodszor bemutatja a jeruzsálemi gyülekezet pünkösöd után bekövetkezett fejlődését. Azzal, hogy sok zsidó-keresztyén hívő észak felé menekült, miután halálra kövezték Istvánt, az anya-gyülekezet szerzett egy leány-gyülekezetet Antiókiában.

Végül felhívja a figyelmet, hogy Jeruzsálem, mint anyagyülekezet, hogyan táplálta a többi gyülekezetet a Jeruzsálemből kiinduló misszió során, amiről a hét katolikus levél tanúskodik. A két másik, nem Pál apostol által írt újszövetségi levelet – a Zsidókhöz írt levelet és a Jelenések könyvét – is megvizsgálja a jeruzsálemi távlat felől.

Ilyen módon áll össze az apostoli egyház fejlődésének képe jeruzsálemi perspektívából.