

The Origin and Significance of the Flight to Pella Tradition

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THE CHURCH FATHERS EUSEBIUS AND EPIPHANIUS said that before Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70, Christians fled from the city to the town of Pella in Transjordan. Some scholars suggest that the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* and Luke 21:20-22 implicitly refer to the same event. The tradition about the flight to Pella is an important piece in the puzzle of Christian origins and early expansion,¹ but how should it be interpreted?

In a recent study, Gerd Lüdemann argued that the tradition arose in the second century among Jewish Christians in Pella, who claimed to be the successors of the original apostolic church in Jerusalem.² Lüdemann observes that pseudonymous writings in the NT tried to legitimate their form of Christianity by ascribing it to an apostle. He suggests that Christians at Pella traced their origins back to the original Jerusalem congregation in order to legitimate their form of Jewish Christianity. Lüdemann's careful

¹ Note esp. G. Lüdemann, "The Successors of Pre-70 Jerusalem Christianity: A Critical Evaluation of the Pella Tradition," *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition* (ed. E. P. Sanders; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980) 1. 161-73. The material also appears in Lüdemann's *Paulus, der Heidenapostel* (2 vols.; FRLANT 123 and 130; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983) 2. 265-86. Lüdemann's work contains extensive bibliography on the Pella tradition. Pella also figures in the work of J. L. Martyn (*The Gospel of John in Christian History* [New York: Paulist, 1978] 62-63), and H. Koester (*Introduction to the New Testament* [2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982] 2. 198-201), and H. C. Kee (*Understanding the New Testament* [4th ed.; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1983] 119-20).

² Lüdemann, "Successors," esp. 172-73.

analysis provides a helpful basis for further discussion of the problem. We will reexamine the evidence in light of Lüdemann's work, asking how the tradition originated and how it functioned in the early church.

I. Eusebius

The earliest account that specifically mentions the Pella flight is found in Eusebius' *Historia Ecclesiastica* (3.5.3), a work which he wrote at Caesarea in A.D. 312. Eusebius begins his account of the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 by describing how the apostles were driven out of Jerusalem by Jewish plots, then writes:

The people of the church in Jerusalem, in accordance with a certain oracle that was given through revelation to those who were worthy in the place, were commanded to migrate from the city before the war and to settle in a certain city of Perea—Pella it was called—to which those who believed in Christ migrated from Jerusalem, so that when holy men had completely abandoned the royal capital of the Jews and the whole land of Judea, the judgment of God might at last overtake them for all their crimes against the Christ and his apostles, utterly blotting out that very generation of the wicked from among humankind.³

The Pella tradition includes three main elements: (1) the miraculous escape of Christians from Jerusalem, (2) their relocation in Pella, (3) the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem. Eusebius told the entire story in subordinate clauses to show how God delivered the righteous and destroyed the wicked, which is his main point. The narrative is patterned to some extent after the biblical account of the fall of Sodom (Genesis 19), which follows the same basic outline. Eusebius explicitly compares the fall of Sodom to the fall of Jerusalem in *Hist. eccl.* 6.6.16 and *Demonstr. Ev.* 6.18.14.

Despite the pronounced theological shaping of the material, Eusebius almost certainly did not contrive the story. He could have made his point simply by stating that Christians fled from Jerusalem before the city was destroyed; he did not need to mention the place of relocation. Most scholars believe that Eusebius drew his information from a source. Some have sug-

³ *Hist. eccl.* 3.5.3: καὶ τοῦ λαοῦ τῆς ἐν Ἱεροσολύμοις ἐκκλησίας κατὰ τινα χρησμόν τοῖς αὐτόθι δοκίμοις δι' ἀποκαλύψεως ἐκδοθέντα πρὸ τοῦ πολέμου μεταναστῆναι τῆς πόλεως καὶ τινα τῆς Περαιᾶς πόλιν οἰκεῖν κεκελευσμένου, Πέλλαν αὐτὴν ὀνομάζουσιν, ἐν ἣ τῶν εἰς Χριστὸν πεπιστευκότων ἀπὸ τῆς Ἱερουσαλὴμ μετῳκισμένων, ὡς ἂν παντελῶς ἐπιλελοιπότων ἁγίων ἀνδρῶν αὐτὴν τε τὴν Ἰουδαίων βασιλικὴν μητρόπολιν καὶ σύμπασαν τὴν Ἰουδαίαν γῆν, ἣ ἐκ θεοῦ δίκη λοιπὸν αὐτοὺς ἅτε τοσαῦτα εἰς τε τὸν Χριστὸν καὶ τοὺς ἀποστόλους αὐτοῦ παρηνομηκότας μετῆει, τῶν ἀσεβῶν ἄρδην τὴν γενεὰν αὐτὴν ἐκείνην ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἀφανίζουσα. The Greek text is from K. Lake, *Eusebius. The Ecclesiastical History* (LCL; Cambridge, MA: Harvard; London: Heinemann, 1926) 1. 200. The translation is the author's.

gested that the source was the second-century author Hegesippus,⁴ but Lüdemann argues convincingly against this view and plausibly suggests Ariston of Pella, a Jewish Christian who lived in the mid-second century.⁵ Eusebius used Ariston's work as his source for the Bar Kochba revolt (*Hist. eccl.* 4.6.3); and may also have relied on Ariston for information about the first Jewish revolt and the flight to Pella. If Ariston was Eusebius' source, then the tradition would date back to at least the second century.

II. Epiphanius

A form of the Pella tradition appears again in the late fourth century, in two works by Epiphanius, who spent much of his life in Palestine, near Eleutheropolis, until becoming bishop on Cyprus in A.D. 367. His first reference to the Pella tradition appears in his *Panarion* 29.7.7-8:⁶

7. This heresy of the Nazoraeans exists in Beroea around Coele Syria, and in the Decapolis around the area of Pella, and in Basanitis in the so-called Kokabe (but the so-called Chochabe in Hebrew). 8. For from there it originated after the migration from Jerusalem, after all the disciples had settled in Pella, because Christ had told them to leave Jerusalem and to depart, since it was about to suffer siege; and for this reason, after settling in Perea, they were living there, as I said. There the Nazoraean heresy had its beginning.⁷

A second reference to the Pella flight occurs in the *Panarion* 30.2.7 in a discussion of the Ebionites:

[The Ebionites] originated after the capture of Jerusalem. For at that time all who believed in Christ had settled predominantly in Perea, in a certain city called Pella of the Decapolis, of which it is written in the gospel [that it is] near

⁴ E.g., H. Lawlor, *Eusebiana* (Oxford: Oxford University, 1912) 30-31; B. Gray, "The Movements of the Jerusalem Church During the First Jewish War," *JEH* 24 (1973) 1-7, esp. p. 2.

⁵ Lüdemann, "Successors," 165-66. Here Lüdemann adopts the earlier suggestion of A. Schlatter.

⁶ The *Panarion*, or "Medicine Chest," was written in A.D. 377 on Cyprus as an antidote for eighty different heresies. Basic information on Epiphanius appears in J. Quasten, *Patrology* (3 vols.; Westminster, MD: Newman, 1950-60) 3. 384-89.

⁷ *Pan.* 29.7.7-8: 7. ἔστιν δὲ αὐτὴ ἡ αἵρεσις ἡ Ναζωραίων ἐν τῇ Βεροιαίων περὶ τὴν Κοίλην Συρίαν καὶ ἐν τῇ Δεκαπόλει περὶ τὰ τῆς Πέλλης μέρη καὶ ἐν τῇ Βασανίτιδι ἐν τῇ λεγομένῃ Κωκάβη, Χωχάβη δὲ Ἑβραϊστὶ λεγομένη. 8. ἐκεῖθεν γὰρ ἡ ἀρχὴ γέγονε, μετὰ τὴν ἀπὸ τῶν Ἱεροσολύμων μετὰστασιν πάντων τῶν μαθητῶν ἐν Πέλλῃ φκηκότων, Χριστοῦ φήσαντος καταλεῖψαι τὰ Ἱεροσόλυμα καὶ ἀναχωρῆσαι δι' ἣν ἡμελλε πάσχειν πολιορκίαν. καὶ ἐκ τῆς τοιαύτης ὑποθέσεως τὴν Περαιῶν οἰκήσαντες ἐκεῖσε, ὡς ἔφην, διέτριβον. ἐντεῦθεν ἡ κατὰ τοὺς Ναζωραίους αἵρεσις ἔσχεν τὴν ἀρχήν. The Greek texts of the *Panarion* are from A. F. J. Klijn and G. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish Christian Sects* (NovTSup 36; Leiden: Brill, 1973) 172 and 176. The translations are the author's.

the region of Batanaea and Basanitis. At that time, after having migrated there and while they were living there, from this [place] Ebion's pretense began.⁸

The final reference to Pella appears in his later work, the *Treatise on Weights and Measures (W&M)*, chap. 15.⁹ The context describes Aquila's visit to Jerusalem about A.D. 129, during Hadrian's reign. Because this text plays an important role in Lüdemann's argument, it will be quoted at some length:

14. [. . . Hadrian] found the entire city devastated and the temple of God trampled down, except for a few houses and the church of God, which was small, where the disciples, after they returned when the Savior was taken up from the Mount of Olives, went up to the upper room. For there it had been built, that is, in the part of Zion that was kept from the destruction, and the blocks of houses around Zion itself, and seven synagogues, which stood alone in Zion like huts, one of which remained until the time of Maximona the bishop and Constantine the king, "like a booth in a vineyard," as it is written. Therefore Hadrian decided to build the city, but not the temple. And he took this Aquila, who was mentioned before, as interpreter. . . .

15. So Aquila, while he was in Jerusalem, also saw the disciples of the disciples of the apostles flourishing in the faith and working great signs, healings and other wonders. For they had returned from the city of Pella to Jerusalem and were teaching. For when the city was about to be seized by the Romans, all the disciples were forewarned by an angel to migrate from the city, since it was about to be completely destroyed. After they emigrated, they settled in Pella, the city previously mentioned, across the Jordan, which is said to be of the Decapolis. But after Jerusalem was destroyed, they returned, as I said, and performed great signs. Therefore since Aquila was prodded in his mind, he believed in Christianity.¹⁰

⁸ *Pan.* 30.2.7: γέγονε δὲ ἡ ἀρχὴ τούτων μετὰ τὴν τῶν Ἱεροσολύμων ἄλωσιν. ἐπειδὴ γὰρ πάντες οἱ εἰς Χριστὸν πεπιστευκότες τὴν Περαιάν κατ' ἐκεῖνο καιροῦ κατῴκησαν τὸ πλεῖστον, ἐν Πέλλῃ τινὶ πόλει καλουμένη τῆς Δεκαπόλεως τῆς ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ γεγραμμένης πλησίον τῆς Βαταναίας καὶ Βασανίτιδος χώρας, τὸ τηρικαῦτα ἐκεῖ μεταναστάντων καὶ ἐκέτισε διατριβόντων αὐτῶν, γέγονεν ἐκ τούτου πρόφασις τῷ Ἐβίῳ.

⁹ The *Treatise on Weights and Measures* is a dictionary of the Bible that includes evaluations of various versions of the scriptures. It was written in A.D. 392 in Constantinople for a Persian priest.

¹⁰ *W&M* 14-15: 14. [. . . Ἀδριανός] εὗρε τὴν πόλιν πᾶσαν ἠδαφισμένην, καὶ τὸ ἱερόν τοῦ θεοῦ καταπεπατημένον, παρεκτός ὀλίγων οἰκημάτων καὶ τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ Ἐκκλησίας, μικρᾶς οὔσης, ἐνθα ὑποστρέψαντες οἱ μαθηταί, ὅτε ὁ Σωτὴρ ἀνελήφθη ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἐλαιῶνος, ἀνέβησαν εἰς τὸ ὑπερφῶν. Ἐκεῖ γὰρ ᾠκοδόμητο, τουτέστιν ἐν τῷ μέρει Σιών, ἧτις ἀπὸ τῆς ἐρημώσεως παρελήφθη, καὶ μέρη οἰκήσεωσιν περὶ αὐτὴν τὴν Σιών, καὶ ἑπτὰ συναγωγαί, αἱ ἐν τῇ Σιών μόναι ἐστήκεσαν, ὡς καλύβαι, ἐξ ὧν μία περιελήφθη, ἕως χρόνου Μαξιμιανῆ τοῦ ἐπισκόπου καὶ Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ βασιλέως, ὡς σκηπὴ ἐν ἀμπελώνι, κατὰ τὸ γεγραμμένον. Διανοεῖται οὖν ὁ Ἀδριανὸς τὴν πόλιν κτίσαι, οὐ μὴν τὸ ἱερόν. Καὶ λαβὼν τὸν Ἀκύλαν τοῦτον τὸν προειρημένον ἐρμηνευτὴν . . .

The main elements of Epiphanius' account are essentially the same as those of Eusebius: (1) the miraculous escape from Jerusalem, (2) the relocation in Pella, (3) the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem. Lüdemann, following the analysis of H. Lawlor, observes that the accounts of Eusebius and Epiphanius include many identical or similar words.¹¹ Therefore he concludes that Epiphanius based all his Pella texts on Eusebius' *Hist. eccl.* 3.5.3.

Nevertheless, Epiphanius' vocabulary actually differs significantly from that of Eusebius. First, Eusebius and Epiphanius sometimes use the same words in quite different ways. In *Hist. eccl.* 3.5.2 the expression Χριστοῦ φήσαντος occurs in the story of the apostles' flight from Jerusalem and introduces Jesus' "great commission" (Matt 28:19). In *Pan.* 29.7.8 the same expression introduces the *oracle* that warned the Jerusalem congregation to flee. The term ἄρδην is part of Eusebius' theological summary and refers to the destruction of a *generation*. Epiphanius includes it in the oracle that warned Christians to flee and uses it for the destruction of *Jerusalem*. Epiphanius probably did not derive these expressions from Eusebius.

Second, the remaining verbal similarities do not provide strong links between the accounts of Eusebius and Epiphanius. Apart from the place names Jerusalem, Pella, Perea, the similarities are as follows:

Words identical in Eusebius and Epiphanius			
<i>Hist. Eccl.</i> ἡ πόλις	<i>Panarion</i> 29	<i>Panarion</i> 30	<i>Weights & Measures</i> ἡ πόλις
τις πόλις			τις πόλις
μεταναστῆναι		μεταναστῆναι	

15. Ὁ τοίνυν Ἀκύλας διάγων ἐν τῇ Ἱερουσαλήμ, καὶ ὄρων τοὺς μαθητὰς τῶν μαθητῶν ἀποστόλων ἀνορθῶντας τῇ πίστει, καὶ σημεῖα μεγάλα ἐργαζομένους ἰάσεων καὶ ἄλλων θαυμάτων. Ἦσαν γὰρ ὑποστρέψαντες ἀπὸ Πέλλης τῆς πόλεως εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ, καὶ διδάσκοντες. Ἦνίκα γὰρ ἐμελλεν ἡ πόλις ἀλίσκεσθαι ὑπὸ τῶν Ῥωμαίων, προεχρηματίσθησαν ὑπὸ ἀγγέλου πάντες οἱ μαθηταὶ μεταστῆναι ἀπὸ τῆς πόλεως, μελλούσης ἄρδην ἀπόλλυσθαι. Οἴτινες καὶ μετανάσται γενόμενοι ἔφυκον ἐν Πέλλῃ τῇ προγεγραμμένῃ πόλει, πέραν τοῦ Τορδάνου, ἥτις ἐκ Δεκαπόλεως λέγεται εἶναι. Μετὰ δὲ τὴν ἐρήμωσιν Ἱερουσαλήμ ἐπαναστρέψαντες, ὡς ἔφην, σημεῖα μεγάλα ἐπετέλουν. ὁ οὖν Ἀκύλας κατανοεῖς τὴν διάνοιαν, τῷ Χριστιανισμῷ ἐπίστευσεν. The Greek text is found in *PG* 43, cols. 260-61. The translation is the author's. An English translation of the Syriac version is found in J. E. Dean, *Epiphanius' Treatise on Weights and Measures: The Syriac Version* (Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 11; Chicago: University of Chicago, 1935).

¹¹ Lawlor, *Eusebiana*, 30. Cf. Lüdemann, "Successors," 246 n. 15.

Words identical in Eusebius and Epiphanius			
οἰκεῖν	οἰκεῖν		οἰκεῖν
οἱ εἰς Χριστὸν πεπιστευκότες		οἱ εἰς Χριστὸν πεπιστευκότες	

Words similar in Eusebius and Epiphanius			
χρησμός			προχρηματίζειν
ὀνομάζειν (re- ferring to Pella)		καλεῖν (refer- ring to Pella)	
μετανασθῆναι	μετάστασις		μετασθῆναι (from μεθίστημι) μετανάστης
μετοικεῖν		κατοικεῖν	

Note that the number of words found in both authors is relatively small and that in most cases a word occurs in Eusebius and only *one* of Epiphanius' accounts. Moreover, nearly all the words shared by both authors are quite common.

Third, Eusebius uses a number of distinctive words that do not appear in *any* of Epiphanius' accounts. These include:

ἐκκλησία	πόλεμος	βασιλική μητρόπολις
δόκιμος	ἐπιλείπειν	ἅγιοι ἄνδρες
ἀποκάλυψις		Ἰουδαία γῆ

Therefore, analysis of vocabulary does not suggest that Epiphanius based his accounts on that of Eusebius.

Two other factors suggest that Epiphanius knew of the Pella tradition independently of Eusebius. First, Eusebius cited the Pella tradition to show how God delivered the righteous and destroyed the wicked. None of Epiphanius' accounts share Eusebius' distinctive theological emphasis. Second, Eusebius mentions the Pella flight only once; Epiphanius mentions it three times and in his *Treatise on Weights and Measures* it interrupts the flow of the narrative. If Epiphanius knew *only* Eusebius' brief mention of the Pella flight, he would probably not have mentioned it as often as he did. Epiphanius probably learned of the Pella tradition from an unknown source other than Eusebius.¹²

Did Epiphanius know of Christians who used the Pella tradition to provide an apostolic foundation for their form of Jewish Christianity? Lüdemann maintains that Epiphanius did know of such claims and that he tried to refute them.¹³ In *W&M* 14 Epiphanius said that the Jerusalem congregation used to meet in the building where the disciples gathered after Jesus' ascension, and that building was not destroyed in A.D. 70. Moreover, in *W&M* 15, Epiphanius said that Christians returned from Pella to Jerusalem. Lüdemann concludes that Epiphanius was insisting that the successors of the original Jerusalem church were to be found in Jerusalem, not in Pella.

Nevertheless, there is considerable evidence that Epiphanius did not associate the Pella tradition with controversies over apostolicity. First, Epiphanius mentions the return to Jerusalem only in his *Treatise on Weights and Measures*, not in his *Panarion*, an earlier work that addressed numerous heresies. In the *Panarion*, Epiphanius recounts how Christians fled from Jerusalem, then says: "after settling in Perea, they were living there, as I said. There the Nazorean heresy had its beginning" (29.7.8). Later, he again states that Christians fled to Pella and says: "at that time, after having migrated there and while they were living there, from this [place] Ebion's pretense began" (30.2.7). The *Panarion* does not suggest that the fugitives returned to Jerusalem.

Second, the references just cited show that Epiphanius saw the refugees from Jerusalem as orthodox Christians who later fell prey to heresy. He could hold such a position because he, like Eusebius, assumed that the group that went to Pella included no apostles, whom he considered to be the guardians of orthodoxy. The fugitives to Pella included "all the disciples" (*Pan.* 29.7.8), which meant "all who believed in Christ" (30.2.7). They were "the disciples of the apostles" (*W&M* 15) rather than the apostles themselves.

Third, if Epiphanius had known of sectarian groups that used the Pella tradition to bolster claims to apostolicity, he would have refuted such claims explicitly, as he does elsewhere. For example, the Ebionites claimed that their name, meaning "the poor," derived from a time when they sold their belongings and laid the money at the feet of the apostles (*Pan.* 30.17.2). Epiphanius denied this, insisting that their identity derived from Ebion, their founder. The Ebionites had noncanonical books bearing the names of apostles (30.23.1-2). Epiphanius attacked these writings by telling a story to show that the apostle John knew of Ebion and considered him heretical. He concluded: "It is clear to everyone that the apostles disowned the faith of Ebion and considered it foreign to the character of their own preaching" (30.24.7).

¹³ *Ibid.*, 169-70.

Fourth, in *W&M* 14 Epiphanius did mention that the Jerusalem church building survived the war, but adds that seven synagogues and several houses were also spared. He neither singled out the church for special attention nor pointed to the church building as proof of the continual presence of apostolic Christians in Jerusalem.

Fifth, Epiphanius mentioned the story of the fugitives' return from Pella to explain how there could be Christians in Jerusalem at the time of Aquila's visit in A.D. 129 (*W&M* 15). Epiphanius may have assumed that his readers knew the story about the flight to Pella and would wonder how there could be Christians in Jerusalem during Hadrian's reign, or he simply may have digressed. Either way, the polemic in the passage is directed at Aquila and his translation of the Bible, not at the Pella tradition. Therefore none of Epiphanius' references to the Pella tradition suggest that it was created or used to legitimate Jewish Christian claims to apostolicity.

III. The Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions*

Indirect evidence of the Pella tradition appears in the Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* 1.37 and 39. The context is a summary of redemptive history from the time of Abraham to the early period of the Jerusalem church (1.33-71). Chaps. 37 and 39 recount Israel's history from the time of Moses to the time prior to Jesus, the true prophet (1.40.2), and allude to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Since the Greek text of the *Recognitions* has been lost, we are dependent on the Syriac and Latin versions of the text, both from the early fifth century. English translations of both versions are provided below.¹⁴

¹⁴ The Latin text of *Recog.* 1.37.1-4 reads: "1. ad haec autem etiam locum statuit, in quo solo liceret eis immolare deo. 2. hoc autem totum eo prospectu gerebat, ut cum tempus opportunum venisset et didicissent per prophetam, quia deus misericordiam vult et non sacrificium, viderent eum qui eos doceret locum dei electum esse sapientiam eius, in qua conveniret offerri hostias deo, hunc autem locum, qui ad tempus videbatur electus, incursionibus hostium et excidiis saepe vexatum, et ad ultimum quoque audirent penitus excidendum. 3. ad cuius rei fidem etiam ante adventum veri prophetae, qui esset hostias cum loco pariter repudiaturus, saepe ab hostibus populatus est et igni incensus; 4. atque in captivitatem populus abductus in exterarum nationes et exinde cum ad misericordiam dei confugeret revocatus est, ut per haec doceretur, quia sacrificia offerens expellitur et in manus hostium traditur, misericordiam vero faciens et iustitiam, sine sacrificiis de captivitate liberatur et in terram patriam restituitur." The Latin of *Recog.* 1.39.1-3 reads, "1. Ut autem tempus adesse coepit, quo id quod deesse Moysei institutis diximus impleretur et propheta quem praecinerat appareret, qui eos primo per misericordiam dei moneret cessare a sacrificiis, 2. et ne forte putarent cessantibus hostiis remissionem sibi non fieri peccatorum, baptismum eis per aquam statuit, in quo ab omnibus peccatis invocato eius nomine solverentur et de reliquo perfectam vitam sequentes in immortalitate durerent, non pecudum sanguine sed sapientiae dei purificatione purgati. 3. denique etiam hoc

RECOGNITIONS I.37.1-4

*Syriac**Latin*

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| <p>1. (37.1) [Moses] appointed a place for them</p> <p>2. in which alone it was permitted</p> <p>3. for them to offer sacrifices.</p> <p>4. (37.2) And all this he contrived for them,</p> <p>5. that when the fitting time should come,</p> <p>6. in which they could understand</p> <p>7.</p> <p>8. that God desires mercy and not sacrifices,</p> <p>9. then the prophet who would say these things</p> <p>10. would be sent to them.</p> <p>11.</p> <p>12. And those who believed in him,</p> <p>13. in the Wisdom of God,</p> <p>14. would be led to a secure place of the land</p> <p>15. that they might survive and be preserved</p> <p>16.</p> <p>17.</p> <p>18.</p> <p>19. from the war, which afterward came upon</p> <p>20. those who did not believe, because of their division,</p> <p>21. for their destruction.</p> | <p>[Moses] also appointed a place</p> <p>in which alone it would be permitted for them to sacrifice to God.</p> <p>And all this he arranged with this view,</p> <p>that when the fitting time had come,</p> <p>and they had learned through the prophet</p> <p>that God desires mercy and not sacrifice,</p> <p>they would see him who would teach them</p> <p>that the place chosen by God, in which it</p> <p>is proper that victims be offered to God,</p> <p>is his Wisdom.</p> <p>And moreover, that this place which seemed chosen for a time, though often disturbed by hostile invasions and destructions,</p> <p>they would also hear, that at last it would be utterly destroyed.</p> |
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ponitur evidens magni mysterii huius indicium, ut omnis qui credens prophetae huic, qui a Moysae praedictus est, baptizaretur in nomine ipsius, ab excidio belli quod incredulae genti imminet ac loco ipsi, servaretur in laesus, non credentes vero extorres loco et regno fiant, ut vel inviti intellegant et oboediant voluntati dei." The Latin text is from B. Rehm, *Die Pseudoklementinen II* (GCS 51; Berlin: Akademie, 1956) 30-31. A translation of the entire Latin text appears in the ANF 8. For the Syriac text see W. Frankenberg, *Die syrische Clementinen mit griechischen Paralleltext* (TU 48.3; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1937) 44-46. The translations printed above are the author's.

22. But this war did not happen suddenly and unexpectedly.
23. (37.3) Rather,
24. even before the coming of the true prophet
25. who was yet to come for the abolition
26. of sacrifices,
- 27.
28. war came upon them many times,
29. by the providence of God,
30. (37.4) and they were taken away into captivity
31. to a foreign people.
32. And because they no longer had that place,
33. in which the law had established
34. that they should sacrifice,
35. he gave them permission, that those who
36. kept the law without sacrifices
37. would be returned and redeemed.
38. And indeed this often happened to them,
39. that they might understand that those who
40. keep the law without sacrifices
41. are redeemed;
42. but when they go to their place
43. and offer sacrifices,
44. they depart and are cast out from it,
- 45.
46. so that they might cease
47. and never offer sacrifices again.
- 48.
- 49.
- 50.
- Moreover, to persuade them of this, even before the coming of the true prophet who was to repudiate sacrifices, together with the place, it was often devastated by enemies and burned with fire, and the people were taken away into captivity among foreign nations.
- When they took refuge in the mercy of God they were returned from there
- that by this they might be taught
- that those who offer sacrifices are driven out and handed over into the hands of the enemy,
- but those who do mercy and justice, without sacrifices, are freed from captivity and returned to their native land.

RECOGNITIONS I.39.1-3

Syriac

1. (39.1) Therefore when that which was lacking
2. drew near, namely that which the arrangement needed,
3. the fitting time arrived, in which
- 4.
5. that prophet, whom Moses foretold before-
6. hand appeared.
7. And when he came,
8. through the compassion of God,
9. he first of all admonished them
10. to cease from sacrificing.
11. (39.2) And in order that they not suppose
12. that they would be deprived of
13. forgiveness of sins through sacrifices,
14. and that this be a hindrance for them
15. so that they not be persuaded,
16. baptism through water for the
17. forgiveness of sins was instituted.
18. And it was shown to them that it
19. truly provides forgiveness of sins,
- 20.
21. and that it is able to keep
22. those who are perfected
23. in life eternal, so they do not die.
24. (39.3) So that when they pleased
25. God in his ineffable wisdom,
- 26.

Latin

- So when the time began to draw near when that which we have said was lacking in the institutions of Moses would be supplied and the prophet whom he had foretold would appear through the mercy of God, he first of all admonished them to cease from sacrifices. And lest by chance they suppose that with the cessation of sacrifices there would be no remission of sins for them, he instituted baptism through water for them, by which they would be absolved from all sins by the invocation of his name, and for the future, following a perfect life, they might then abide in immortality, purified not by the blood of beasts, but by the purification of the Wisdom of God.
- (39.3) And then, moreover, a clear indication

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| 27. | of this great mystery is provided,
namely, |
| 28. | that everyone who, believing
in this prophet |
| 29. | who was foretold by Moses, |
| 30. | would be baptized in his name, |
| 31. they would be saved | would be kept unhurt |
| 32. from the war which was about
to come for | from the destruction of war |
| 33. the destruction of those
who were not persuaded | which hangs over the
unbelieving nation |
| 34. | and the place itself. |
| 35. in order that what they refused | Those who did not believe |
| 36. to do willingly | |
| 37. when they went out from their
country | would certainly become exiles |
| 38. and were uprooted from that
place, | from the place and kingdom, |
| 39. [regarding] this matter, it
would be | |
| 40. to them, even if they were un-
willing, | that even unwillingly |
| 41. | they might learn and obey |
| as God saw fit; | the will of God. |
| 42. they would suffer being driven
out. | |

The three main elements of the Pella tradition do appear in these texts. The Syriac version of chap. 37 mentions: (1) the escape of Christians from Jerusalem (line 15), (2) relocation in “a secure place of the land” (line 14), which may be Pella, and (3) the subsequent destruction of Jerusalem (lines 19-21). Chap. 39 alludes to the escape of the Christians from Jerusalem and subsequent destruction of the city (lines 24-42), but does not mention relocation. Although Pella is not explicitly mentioned, Strecker has convincingly argued that these passages once circulated among Christians in Transjordan, who would have understood “a secure place of the land” as a reference to Pella.¹⁵ Therefore *Recog.* 1.37 and 39 can be taken as implicit references to the Pella tradition.

The form of the tradition probably stems from the second century. Strecker has plausibly argued that these chapters were part of a second-

¹⁵ G. Strecker, *Das Judenchristentum in den Pseudoklementinen* (TU 70; 2d ed.; Berlin: Akademie, 1981) 229-31, 253-54. The allusion to Pella was first noted by H.-J. Schoeps, *Theologie und Geschichte des Judenchristentums* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1949) 47-48, 267.

century work known as the *Ascents of James*.¹⁶ His translation of these passages generally follows the Latin text, into which he inserted the Syriac of 37.2.¹⁷ Further analysis of the Syriac and Latin versions bolsters Strecker's hypothesis, but indicates that the Syriac text best represents the second-century form of the material.

First, both versions of chap. 37, lines 11-14 refer to a "place." In the Syriac, the "place" is a geographical location; in the Latin it is God's wisdom. Jewish Christian readers from Transjordan would have understood the "place" as an allusion to Pella, but to others the meaning would have been unclear. The Syriac translator probably would not have changed the reference to God's wisdom into a reference to a vague geographical location. Instead, the Latin translator probably did not understand the allusion to a geographical location and reinterpreted it as God's wisdom.

Second, the Syriac version twice says that God redeems those who keep the law without sacrifices (chap. 37, lines 35-37, 39-41). In contrast, the corresponding Latin text says that God redeems those who take refuge in his mercy and who do mercy (lines 36 and 48). The Syriac translator, who was presumably a Christian, would probably not have substituted the Mosaic "law" for "mercy," especially since line 8 states that God desires "mercy." Instead, the Latin translator probably omitted references to the law by making the word "mercy" from line 8 into the theme for the entire chapter (cf. lines 36 and 48).

Third, the Syriac version refers to a war that would occur after the coming of the true prophet, in which unbelievers would be destroyed and expelled from their place of sacrifice (chap. 37, lines 20-21; chap. 39, line 42). The text once recalls the return from the Babylonian exile (line 37). The Latin version focuses more on the destruction of the temple (chap. 37, lines 21, 27; chap. 39, line 34) than of unbelievers, and twice mentions a return to the land (chap. 37, lines 37, 50). The Syriac translator presupposes the destruction of the temple (chap. 37, line 32) and had no apparent reason to omit references to the temple or the hope for return. The Latin translator may have added references to the temple and the promise of a return to harmonize the account of the destruction of the second temple with biblical accounts of the destruction of the first temple, exile, and restoration.

The distinctive elements in the Latin text accord well with the interests of Rufinus, the Latin translator. Rufinus acknowledged that he would emend texts so that they did not contradict the teaching of the Latin church, clarify

¹⁶ Strecker, *Judenchristentum*, 221-54. For a helpful summary of these issues see Martyn, *Gospel of John*, 59-60.

¹⁷ Strecker, *Judenchristentum*, 226-27.

obscure passages, and harmonize texts.¹⁸ He probably replaced references to observance of the Mosaic law with references to mercy, in order to accommodate the teaching of the Latin church. He apparently tried to clarify the obscure reference to a “a secure place of the land” by identifying the “place” as God’s wisdom. He also may have added references to the temple and a promise of a return to harmonize the passage with OT texts concerning the fall of the first temple and Babylonian exile.

The distinctive elements in the Syriac text correspond to the interests of a second-century Jewish Christian like Ariston of Pella.¹⁹ (1) Ariston would have understood “a secure place of the land” as an allusion to Pella. (2) He was a Jewish Christian who probably observed the Mosaic law, at least to some extent. (3) He wrote in the wake of the Bar Kochba revolt, which resulted in heavy casualties and the expulsion of Jews from Jerusalem and its environs with little hope of return.

Like Eusebius, the author of *Recog.* 1.37 and 39 used the Pella tradition to show how God spared Christians from the destruction experienced by Jews in A.D. 70. The texts do not mention the apostles or try to legitimate Jewish Christianity as opposed to other forms of Christianity. Therefore these texts do not support the hypothesis that the Pella tradition originated and was used to give an apostolic foundation to a form of Jewish Christianity.

IV. Luke 21:20-22

The evidence analyzed thus far takes the Pella tradition back to the mid-second century. Lüdemann insists that first-century sources are silent about the flight to Pella;²⁰ other scholars have argued that certain NT passages do reflect knowledge of the Pella tradition. We will consider only the most important passage here, Luke 21:20-22.²¹

¹⁸ See Rufinus’ prefaces to his translations of the *Recognitions* in ANF 8. 75 and Origen’s *On First Principles* (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973) lxiii.

¹⁹ On Ariston of Pella see A. von Harnack, *Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur bis Eusebius* (2d ed.; Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1958) 1.1.92-95; Quasten, *Patrology* 1. 195-96; E. Schürer et al., *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (rev. ed.; Edinburgh: Clark, 1973) 1. 37-39.

²⁰ Lüdemann, “Successors,” 166-69.

²¹ Luke 21:20-22: “Ὅταν δὲ ἴδῃτε κυκλομένην ὑπὸ στρατοπέδων Ἱερουσαλήμ, τότε γινώτε ὅτι ἤγγικεν ἡ ἐρήμωσις αὐτῆς. 21. τότε οἱ ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ φευγέτωσαν εἰς τὰ ὄρη καὶ οἱ ἐν μέσῳ αὐτῆς ἐκχωρεῖτωσαν καὶ οἱ ἐν ταῖς χώραις μὴ εἰσερχέσθωσαν εἰς αὐτήν, 22. ὅτι ἡμέραι ἐκδικήσεως αὐταὶ εἰσὶν τοῦ πλησθῆναι πάντα τὰ γεγραμμένα. The translation is the author’s. Luke 21:21b literally says “in her midst,” which could refer to the midst of Judea rather than the midst of Jerusalem. But since “her midst” is contrasted with “the country,” translators

- 21:20 But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies,
then know that its desolation has come near.
- 21 Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains
and let those who are in the midst [of the city] depart,
and let not those who are out in the country enter it;
- 22 for these are days of vengeance,
to fulfill all that has been written.

Many scholars assume that Luke has revised Mark 13:14-16 to reflect events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.²² If we adopt this hypothesis, the passage reveals several similarities to the Pella tradition. (1) Luke depicted Jerusalem “surrounded by armies,” which must refer to the fall of the city (21:20). Jerusalem’s destruction is one element in the Pella tradition. (2) Luke retained Mark’s reference to a flight to the mountains (21:21), but transferred the remainder of Mark 13:15-16 to Luke 17:31. Luke may have retained the flight to the mountains in 21:21 because it fit well with what he knew of Jerusalem’s fall. The location of the mountains is not specified, but it is worth noting that Pella lies in the foothills of the Transjordanian highlands and could have fulfilled this requirement. If this is correct, we have the second element of the tradition: relocation in Pella. (3) The command that all in Jerusalem should depart provides the third element of the tradition: escape from the city. In addition to these elements, the passage presents Jerusalem’s destruction as an act of divine vengeance, as in *Hist. eccl.* 3.5.3 and *Recog.* 1.37 and 39.

Nevertheless, Luke 21:20-22 does differ significantly from the Pella tradition. (1) The oracle commands the people in Judea to flee to the mountains, but tells the inhabitants of Jerusalem simply to flee, without specifying a destination. (2) The “mountains” could refer to the region around Pella, but other locations could also satisfy the requirement. (3) Eusebius said that the flight occurred before the war, not during the actual siege as in Luke. (4) Eusebius himself detected many connections between Luke 21:20-22 and the actual fall of Jerusalem (*Hist. eccl.* 3.7.3-6), but he did not associate Luke 21:20-22 with the escape to Pella.

and commentators are generally agreed that “her midst” refers to Jerusalem. So the *RSV*, *NEB*, *JB*, *NIV*, *NAB*, and *TEV*. See also J. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke* (AB 28A; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985) 1342-45; I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (New International Greek Testament Commentary 3; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 772; A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke* (ICC; New York: Scribner’s, 1914) 481.

²² E.g., Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1343-44; F. W. Danker, *Jesus and the New Age* (St. Louis: Clayton, 1972) 212-13; W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975) 150.

Therefore we cannot be certain that Luke did or did not know the Pella tradition. If Luke *did* know the tradition, he recalled it in a general oracular form, without specifying the place of relocation. If he *did not* know the tradition, he did know of people who fled from Jerusalem and Judea during the war. Luke 21:20-22 does not allow us to claim that the Pella tradition was known or unknown in the first century; both interpretations are possible.

V. Conclusions

Our investigation contributes to the current discussion of the Pella tradition's origin and its function in the early church. Lüdemann has argued that the Pella tradition does not recall actual events of the first century for a number of reasons.²³ First, the sources are of a relatively late date. Second, the sources are limited to the region around Pella. Third, the sources are few in number. Fourth, the tradition conflicts with second-century sources that assume that the Jerusalem congregation continued to exist in Jerusalem after A.D. 70.

Nevertheless, our investigation indicated that the Pella tradition probably does recall actual first-century events. First, the NT evidence for the tradition is stronger than Lüdemann allows. Luke 21:20-22 does not prove that the tradition was known in the first century, but neither does it prove that the tradition was unknown at that time. Therefore NT evidence makes a first-century date *possible*.

Second, the tradition is attested in several independent sources, not all of which stem from the region around Pella. (1) The Syriac version of *Recog.* 1.37 and 39 probably preserves a form of the tradition that circulated in the region around Pella in the mid-second century. (2) Eusebius learned of the tradition from a text other than that preserved in *Recog.* 1.37 and 39, since Eusebius mentions Pella by name and the *Recognitions* do not. Eusebius' source may have been Ariston of Pella. (3) Epiphanius knew of the tradition from an unknown source other than Eusebius' *Hist. eccl.* 3.5.3 or *Recog.* 1.37 and 39. Epiphanius shows no knowledge of the distinctive theological shaping of the tradition found in Eusebius and the *Recognitions*. Therefore we cannot assume that Epiphanius learned of the tradition from a source from Pella.

Third, there are important reasons why the Pella tradition is not more widely attested in early Christian writings. (1) No apostles went to Pella. Once the fugitives separated from the apostles and the city of Jerusalem, they no longer retained any special status in the church at large. Writers like the author of Acts and Eusebius traced the movements of the apostles and their successors, not the histories of individual congregations. (2) The theology and

²³ Lüdemann, "Successors," 170.

practice of Christians at Pella became increasingly distinct from those of Christians elsewhere. Christians at Pella continued to observe the Mosaic law to some extent; they were distinguished from Jews only by their belief in Jesus (*Recog.* 1.43.2; *Pan.* 29.7.5-7). The practices of Jewish Christians were tolerated by some, but sharply criticized by others.²⁴ Therefore the story of the founding of a Jewish Christian congregation at Pella would probably not interest many Christians elsewhere.

Fourth, traditions of an ongoing Christian presence in Jerusalem after A.D. 70 do not necessarily conflict with the Pella tradition. It is possible that not all Christians fled to Pella and that references to the migration of the entire community are overstatements.²⁵ It is also possible that some Christians returned to Jerusalem after A.D. 70 and before Aquila's visit in A.D. 129. The origins of traditions of an ongoing Christian presence in Jerusalem are unclear.²⁶ What is clear is that the ancient sources do not suggest that the Pella tradition was created or ever used to legitimate the Pella congregation's form of Jewish Christianity. Therefore the most plausible explanation for the origin of the tradition is that it recalls actual events of the first century.

Lüdemann has rightly pointed out that our understanding of the role of the tradition is as important as our assessment of its historicity. Our investigation indicates that the church of Pella recounted the tradition to show how God delivered Christians from the punishment that fell on non-Christian Jews when Jerusalem was destroyed (*Recog.* 1.37; 39). Eusebius used the tradition in the same way. The tradition was not used to bolster the claims of Jewish Christians over against those of other Christian groups. The tradition strengthened the identity of Jewish Christians over against non-Christian Jews.

Additional support for our conclusions is found in the patristic references to Ariston of Pella's lost *Dialogue between Jason and Papiscus*.²⁷ The *Dialogue* described how Jason, a Jewish Christian, demonstrated Jesus' messiahship to Papiscus, a Jew from Alexandria. There is no evidence that either the *Dialogue* or the Pella tradition was used to legitimate a form of Jewish Christianity over against other forms of Christianity. The *Dialogue* helped Christians at Pella and elsewhere answer Jewish objections to Christian teachings. Similarly, the Pella tradition was used to strengthen Christian claims by showing how God spared Christians from the destruction experienced by Jews in A.D. 70.

²⁴ On the relationships between Jewish Christians and other Christians up to about A.D. 500, see the appendix by G. Strecker, "On the Problem of Jewish Christianity," in W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity* (ed. R. Kraft and G. Krodel; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971) 241-85.

²⁵ Lüdemann, "Successors," 246 n. 9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 251 n. 48.

²⁷ On Ariston's *Dialogue* see the literature cited in n. 19 above.