

# THE CHURCH OF JERUSALEM IN THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES<sup>1</sup>

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## I

When Luke speaks of “the church” with no qualification, geographical or otherwise, it is to the church of Jerusalem that he refers. In the earlier part of his second volume, the Acts of the Apostles, that is not surprising, since at that stage in his narrative there is no other church than the church of Jerusalem. The church of Jerusalem is the church *sans phrase*; the church universal is concentrated in one city. Not until the beginning of chapter 13 is the word “church” (ἐκκλησία) used of the followers of Jesus in another city than Jerusalem. There the history of the extension of Christianity from Antioch on the Orontes towards the west and north-west is introduced by a list of leaders “at Antioch, in the church that was there” (Acts 13:1).<sup>2</sup> The church of Antioch was, for Luke, the first of a succession of Gentile churches,<sup>3</sup> but he knows of only one Jewish-Christian church. Even in dispersion (on account of the persecution that broke out after Stephen’s death) the church of Jerusalem remained “the church” in the singular. When the persecution died down with the conversion and departure of the leading persecutor, “then”, says Luke, “the church had peace throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria” (Acts 9:31).

This usage is different from Paul’s: Paul speaks of “the churches of Judaea” in the plural (Galatians 1:22; 1 Thessalonians 2:14).

<sup>1</sup> A lecture delivered in the John Rylands University Library on Wednesday, 5 December 1984.

<sup>2</sup> Gk. ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ κατὰ τὴν οὖσαν ἐκκλησίαν. This attributive use of the present participle of the verb “to be” with ἐκκλησία is practically equivalent to our expression “the local church” (cf. Acts 11:22).

<sup>3</sup> The churches of Antioch (Acts 11:26; 14:27; 15:3), South Galatia (Acts 14:23; 16:5), Syria and Cilicia (Acts 15:41), Ephesus (Acts 20:17, 28).

For Luke, on the other hand, there is only one church in Judaea — the mother-church of the new society. Apart from the Jerusalem church, says Martin Hengel, "Luke ignores the communities in Judaea in an almost offensive way, not to mention those in Galilee, which are mentioned ... only in passing".<sup>4</sup> He mentions "saints" both in Lydda and in Joppa (Acts 9:32, 41), but does not speak of a church in either of these places. The church of Jerusalem retains the primacy over the area of the Christian mission almost (but not altogether) to the end of the narrative of Acts, and in Palestine it enjoys not merely primacy, but monopoly.

Luke's account of the church of Jerusalem is derived from a variety of sources, but he handles his material (whencesoever derived) so that it serves his purpose in writing. He was indebted to more than one Jerusalem source and to at least one source which may provisionally be called Antiochene.<sup>5</sup> In his own handling of the material he presents the church of Jerusalem in two stages — first as the church of the apostles and then as a church ruled by elders. The two stages overlap: the elders appear (Acts 11:30) before the apostles leave the scene. The transition between the two stages is provided by the record of the Apostolic Council, where the responsibility for deliberation and decision is shared by "the apostles and the elders" (Acts 15:6, 22 f.). In the church of the apostles Peter is the dominating figure; in the church ruled by elders, James. It is worth observing that Luke nowhere helps his readers to identify this James, whom he mentions in three places (Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18). This could be because James's identity was so well known in early Christian circles; others have discerned more tendentious reasons for Luke's reticence.<sup>6</sup> There is, in any case, no doubt at all that this is the James to whom Paul refers as "James the Lord's brother" (Galatians 1:19) and who is elsewhere called "James the Just."<sup>7</sup> Peter begins to be phased out at the time of his escape from prison under Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:17). His last appearance in Luke's record is at the Apostolic Council. There he makes a persuasive speech (Acts 15:7-11); but

<sup>4</sup> M. Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*. E.T. (London, 1983), p. 110.

<sup>5</sup> On these and other postulated sources see A. Harnack, *The Acts of the Apostles*, E.T. (London, 1909), pp. 162-202; J. Dupont, *The Sources of Acts*, E.T. (London, 1964), pp. 17-72.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. S.G.F. Brandon, *The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church* (London, 1951), pp. 27f., 46f.

<sup>7</sup> By Hegesippus, quoted in Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, ii. 23.4.

it is James who sums up the sense of the meeting, weaving Peter's testimony into his own argument (Acts 15:13-21).

## II

The church, according to Luke, had its inception in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost in the year of Jesus' death and resurrection. It was inaugurated by the descent of the Spirit, in fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, and by the public proclamation of the gospel by Peter. It comprised the twelve apostles, the family of Jesus, and others associated with these (amounting in all to a hundred and twenty), together with those who believed and were baptized in response to Peter's preaching that day — a total of three thousand (Acts 2:41). In a few weeks the number had increased to five thousand — five thousand *men*, says Luke, apparently not including women and children (Acts 4:4). (This figure of five thousand *men*, which is reminiscent of the narrative of the feeding of the multitude in Mark 6:44, has been ascribed to a different source from the earlier figure of three thousand *persons*.)<sup>8</sup> A quarter of a century later, the number of church members in Jerusalem has risen to many "myriads" (Acts 21:20)<sup>9</sup> — a figure which should not be pressed too literally, especially if Joachim Jeremias was even approximately correct in his estimate of up to 30,000 for the normal population of the city at that time.<sup>10</sup>

The picture of the church of Jerusalem in the first five chapters of Acts is that of a community of enthusiastic followers of Jesus, growing by leaps and bounds, and enjoying the good will of its neighbours. Its members practise community of goods voluntarily and spontaneously, delighting in this way to manifest their conscious unity and charity. True, the serpent which lurks at the heart of every utopia revealed its presence in the sad incident of Ananias and Sapphira, who tried to get credit for being more

<sup>8</sup> There is a contrast between 5,000 *men* (ἄνδρες) in Acts 4:4 and 3,000 *persons* (ψυχαι) in Acts 2:41. Harnack (*Acts*, p. 183) discerns two narratives of the same events.

<sup>9</sup> See n. 53 below for the view that these μυριάδες are all the Jews of Jerusalem and not only the members of the church.

<sup>10</sup> J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, E.T. (London, 1969), pp. 83f.; cf. "Die Einwohnerzahl Jerusalems zur Zeit Jesu" in his *Abba* (Göttingen, 1966), pp. 335-341.

generous than they were (Acts 5:1-11); but the chapter which records their disastrous lapse ends with a description of the increasing activity of the church's apostolic leaders, "teaching and preaching the gospel of Jesus as the Messiah" (Acts 5:42).

It is, then, a complete surprise for the reader to be introduced at the beginning of the next chapter to two rather sharply differentiated groups in the church — the "Hebrews" and the "Hellenists".<sup>11</sup> The members of both these groups were Jewish by birth (except for those Hellenists who were proselytes, converts to Judaism from paganism); they were distinguished from other members of the Jewish religious community by their recognition of Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. The difference between the two groups, it appears, was mainly linguistic: the Hebrews were Aramaic-speaking while the Hellenists were Greek-speaking. To which group would speakers of both languages be assigned? It would depend, probably, on the kind of synagogue they attended. The Hebrews would attend synagogues where the scriptures were read and the prayers said in Hebrew; the Hellenists would attend synagogues where the whole service was conducted in Greek.<sup>12</sup> Here and there throughout the Graeco-Roman world we find reference made to a "synagogue of Hebrews";<sup>13</sup> unless "Hebrews" in such a context is simply a synonym for "Jews", a synagogue so designated might be one where, even in lands of the dispersion, a pious Jew might hear the lessons and the prayers in the sacred language. On the other hand, even in Jerusalem people who knew no language but Greek could attend a synagogue where the service was conducted in that tongue: such was the "synagogue of the Freedmen" mentioned in Acts 6:9 or the synagogue referred to in the Theodotus inscription (discovered in Jerusalem shortly before the outbreak of World War 1).<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Acts 6:1.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. C.F.D. Moule, "Once More, Who were the Hellenists?" *Expository Times*, lxx (1958-59), 100-102; M. Hengel, *Between Jesus and Paul*, pp. 1-29.

<sup>13</sup> On the "synagogue of the Hebrews" in Corinth see *CIJ* 718; B. Powell, "Greek Inscriptions from Corinth", *American Journal of Archaeology*, series 2, vii (1903), 60 f., N<sup>o</sup>. 40; on that in Rome see *CIJ* 291, 317, 510, 535 (also pp. lxxvif.); H.J. Leon, *The Jews of Ancient Rome* (Philadelphia, 1960), pp. 147-149.

<sup>14</sup> *CIJ* 1404. See R. Weill, *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions*, 29 mai 1914, pp. 333 f.; "La cité de David ... Campagne 1913-14", *Revue des études juives*, lxxix (1919), annexe, pl. XXVa; lxxi (1920), pp. 30-34; A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, E.T. (London, <sup>2</sup> 1927), pp. 439-441.

If the basic distinction between the two groups was linguistic, there were other differences of a cultural kind sufficient to give each of them a sense of separate corporate identity. Any real or imagined discrimination which seemed to favour one would be resented by the other. Luke (drawing, it appears, on a new source, different from those which he may have used for the earlier part of his narrative)<sup>15</sup> records one instance of alleged discrimination in the preferential treatment which the Hellenists believed the Hebrew widows were receiving over theirs when daily distribution was made from the common fund to needy members of the community. There may have been other points at issue between the two groups, some of them theological in character, but Luke concentrates (and not here only) on a non-theological area of dispute.<sup>16</sup> He shows true understanding of human nature in this: leaders and teachers of religious bodies may insist on points of theological disagreement, but the rank and file will more readily begin to show an interest when the disagreement affects them in a practical way.

We are dealing here with a situation which may have arisen not more than five years after the death of Jesus and the foundation of the church — probably less than that. What, then, was the origin of this Hellenistic group in the Jerusalem church?

Some scholars have wisely insisted in recent years that the distinction between Palestinian and Hellenistic Judaism should not be overpressed.<sup>17</sup> Palestine had been part of the Hellenistic world since its incorporation in Alexander's empire in 332/1 B.C. Even if there was a violent reaction on the part of many Palestinian Jews against assimilation to Hellenism (especially when such assimilation was forcibly imposed, as it was under Antiochus Epiphanes), those who reacted violently were themselves influenced by other forms of Hellenistic culture than those which they consciously resisted. In Palestine students of religious

<sup>15</sup> This is indicated not only by the subject-matter but also by the transitional formula ἐν δὲ ταῖς ἡμέραις ταύταις.

<sup>16</sup> For example, we know from Paul of his difference with Barnabas over a serious point of principle (Gal. 2:13), but when they part company in Acts, it is over a personal issue (Acts 15:36-39).

<sup>17</sup> See I.H. Marshall, "Palestinian and Hellenistic Christianity", *New Testament Studies*, xix (1972-73), 271-287; M. Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism*, E.T. (London, 1974), *passim*; R. Kuntzmann and J. Schlosser (ed.), *Études sur le judaïsme hellénistique* (Paris, 1984).

law received the "tradition of the elders" which was handed down orally in Hebrew from one generation to another, but there is evidence to suggest that even in rabbinical academies in Palestine provision was made for instruction in Greek.<sup>18</sup>

As for the Jews of the dispersion around the eastern Mediterranean, they were predominantly Hellenists. Even Paul, who insists that he is "a Hebrew of Hebrews"<sup>19</sup> — a Hebrew born and bred — might equally well have been called a Hellenist. Not only was he a native of Tarsus, a Greek-speaking city, but his mastery of Greek shows that it was no foreign language to him. No doubt he was thoroughly bilingual. It has been argued with some probability that, while many Hebrews spoke Greek as well as their Semitic tongue, Hellenists normally knew Greek only.<sup>20</sup> Barnabas, the Levite from Cyprus, a member of the Jerusalem church from early days,<sup>21</sup> was presumably a Hellenist, as was his fellow-Cypriot Mnason, described in Acts 21: 16 as ἀρχαῖος μαθητής (which probably means a foundation-member of the church).

There may well have been Hellenists among Jesus' followers in Jerusalem before his crucifixion; if so, their number was augmented from Pentecost onwards. It was among such Hellenists, rather than in the ranks of the twelve apostles and their close associates, that Jesus' more radical utterances about the temple were cherished and repeated, especially his words about destroying the temple and rebuilding it in three days, which were flung back at him in mockery by passers-by when he was exposed to public derision on the cross.

When the complaint about the unfairness shown to Hellenistic widows was met by the apostles with the advice to choose seven men to supervise the daily distribution, the men appointed to this responsibility all bore Greek names. This in itself does not prove that they were Hellenists: should we conclude that Andrew and Philip among the apostles were Hellenists? Perhaps they were; it is even conceivable that Andrew's parents deliberately brought him up as a Hellenist while they brought his brother Simon up to be a

<sup>18</sup> See W.L. Knox, *Some Hellenistic Elements in Primitive Christianity* (London, 1944), pp. 30-33, commenting on TB *Soṭah* 49b.

<sup>19</sup> Philippians 3:5; cf. 2 Corinthians 11:22.

<sup>20</sup> See C.F.D. Moule, "Once More ...", p. 102 (cf. n. 12 above); M. Hengel (*Between Jesus and Paul*, p. 11) agrees.

<sup>21</sup> Acts 4:36.

Hebrew. (A twentieth-century parallel comes to mind: I knew a family in Bratislava fifty years ago of which one son was sent to a German-speaking school and his brother to a Slovak-speaking school.) But, over and above their Greek names, the general context suggests that the seven men were all Hellenists. This was indubitably true of one of their number, Nicolas the proselyte of Antioch,<sup>22</sup> and it was probably true of them all. The narrative implies, indeed, that they were leaders of the Hellenistic group in the primitive church, fulfilling a much wider ministry than that of *septem viri mensis ordinandis*,<sup>23</sup> to which they were appointed on the occasion described by Luke. When the apostles invited the complainants to select seven men to take charge of the allocation of charity, they responded to the invitation by selecting those whom they already recognized as their leaders.

As Luke develops this phase of his narrative, one point of theological significance which emerges is the different attitude shown to the temple by the leaders of the church as a whole and by the leaders of the Hellenistic group — especially if Stephen's attitude be taken as characteristic of the latter. The apostolic leaders attended the temple at the customary times of prayer and preached in the outer court as Jesus had done, while the members of the church came together daily in Solomon's colonnade, on the east side of the temple area.<sup>24</sup> Stephen, on the other hand, declared that God never desired a permanently fixed dwelling-place like the temple, that a movable shrine was more suitable for a pilgrim people.<sup>25</sup>

Both sides could appeal to the authority of Jesus for their attitude to the temple. Jesus, on the one hand, defended the sanctity of the temple, calling it "my Father's house" (Luke 2:49; John 2:16), and endorsing the prophet's description of it as "a house of prayer for all the nations" (Mark 11:17, quoting Isaiah 56:7). On the other hand, he not only predicted the demolition of the temple structure (Mark 13:2) but also announced its abandonment by God — "your house is forsaken and desolate" (Matthew 23:38) — and its replacement by a new temple "not

<sup>22</sup> Acts 6:5.

<sup>23</sup> As they are called by W.M. Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen* (London, <sup>14</sup> 1920), p. 375.

<sup>24</sup> Acts 3:1, 11; 5:12-21.

<sup>25</sup> Acts 7:44-50.

made with hands" (Mark 14:58).<sup>26</sup> The tension between these two attitudes is resolved by Luke later in the narrative of Acts.<sup>27</sup>

Luke's assessment of the temple is more positive than Stephen's, but he has a lively sympathy with the Hellenistic group of which Stephen was so forthright a spokesman. Naturally so: it was members of that group who, forced to leave Jerusalem because of the persecution that followed Stephen's death, carried the gospel north to Antioch. Antioch, according to tradition, was Luke's native city;<sup>28</sup> in any case, he was keenly interested in Antiochene Christianity and the part it played in the further expansion of the gospel along the road which led ultimately to Rome.

When Jesus was being judicially examined by the high priest and his colleagues, an attempt was made to convict him of a threat to destroy the temple.<sup>29</sup> The attempt failed because the witnesses could not agree on the precise wording of his alleged threat; that he had said something about the destruction of the temple was undoubted. If he had been successfully convicted on this charge, he could perhaps have been sentenced and executed without reference to the Roman governor; violation of the sanctity of the temple was the one area in which the Romans allowed the Jewish authorities to exercise capital jurisdiction. But there was no difficulty about convicting Stephen: when witnesses alleged that he had committed blasphemy against the temple, he effectively convicted himself (in his judges' eyes) by denying that the temple had any place in the divine purpose for Israel. Execution by stoning was the inevitable outcome of the case, the first stones being thrown, in accordance with the ancient law, by the witnesses for the prosecution.<sup>30</sup>

The apostles and their followers enjoyed the good will of the people of Jerusalem, who would, however, resent any attack on the temple or disparagement of its sanctity. When, then, the chief priests launched an attack on Stephen's associates, they could be

<sup>26</sup> This indeed is part of the testimony of the "false witnesses" at Jesus' trial, but the expression is no doubt his own, and entered into the Christian vocabulary.

<sup>27</sup> See p. 659 below.

<sup>28</sup> The tradition is attested in the western text of Acts 11:28 ("when we were gathered together") and in the so-called anti-Marcionite prologue to Luke's Gospel.

<sup>29</sup> Mark 14:57-59, a passage not reproduced in Luke's trial narrative.

<sup>30</sup> Acts 7:58; 22:20; cf. Leviticus 24:14; Deuteronomy 13:9; 17:7.



sure of popular support. Luke uses generalizing terms when he speaks of a "great persecution" breaking out against the church of Jerusalem or of Saul of Tarsus, the chief priests' agent, as "breathing threats and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord" (Acts 8:1; 9:1), but when one reads his narrative carefully, it emerges that the Hellenists bore the brunt of the attack. The apostles are specifically excluded when "all" the members of the church are said to have been scattered throughout Judaea and Samaria.<sup>31</sup>

We should envisage the believing community in Jerusalem as organized in a number of household groups. Those groups closely associated with the apostles (and, it may be surmised, with James and other members of the holy family) seem to have remained *relatively* undisturbed. Paul indeed, when he refers to his active participation in the campaign of repression, says that he "persecuted the church of God" (Galatians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 15:9; cf. Philippians 3:6). Before his conversion he probably saw no difference in principle between the Hebrews and the Hellenists in the church: in his view it was the insistence that the crucified Jesus was the Messiah, not the disparagement of the temple, that was the head and front of the offending. But the tactics dictated by the chief priests, who had no desire to outrage public opinion, confined the attack in the main to the Hellenists. It was the Hellenists who were dispersed; it was they who carried the gospel far and wide as they moved from place to place. The reader of Acts may get the impression that, after their departure, the church of Jerusalem was more monochrome, more consistently and even conservatively "Hebrew", than it had been before. There were, to be sure, a few Hellenists left, like Mnason the Cypriot, who was host to Paul and his companions when they visited the city in A.D. 57; but had there still been a substantial number of them, the members of the mother-church could not have been described, as they were in that year, as "all zealots for the law" (Acts 21:20).<sup>32</sup>

### III

It is difficult to be sure what impact Paul's conversion made on the church of Jerusalem, apart from the fact that, deprived of his

<sup>31</sup> Acts 8:1. Luke sometimes uses "all" in a hyperbolic way.

<sup>32</sup> See p. 658, n. 53 below.

leadership, the persecution died down. Paul's contact with the mother-church was minimal in the earlier years of his Christian career (even in the later years it was not very close or frequent). Luke says that, some time after his conversion, he came to Jerusalem "and tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him and would not believe that he was a [true] disciple". Barnabas, however, took him to the apostles and vouched for his *bona fides*, and he remained in their company, boldly proclaiming his new-found faith, especially to the Hellenists (that is, the non-Christian Hellenists), so that his life was endangered and he had to be got away from Jerusalem in a hurry: "the brothers took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus" (Acts 9:26-30).

This narrative makes a different impression from Paul's own account of the same visit in Galatians 1:18-20,<sup>33</sup> according to which he went up to Jerusalem (from Damascus) three years after his conversion and spent fifteen days with Peter, seeing none of the other apostles during his visit except James, "the Lord's brother". Paul minimizes his contact with the Jerusalem leaders, and calls God to witness that his account is true, in terms which suggest that he is anxious to refute another account which had come to the ears of his converts in Galatia. It has been suggested, notably by the late Olof Linton of Copenhagen, that the other account which Paul is anxious to refute is the account reproduced by Luke in Acts 9:26-30.<sup>34</sup> But this is unlikely. Luke's information about this visit is scanty, and his filling out of that information is mainly redactional. He uses the generalizing plurals "the disciples", "the apostles", "the brothers"; whereas Paul makes it plain that he saw no more than two apostles (and one of these, James, was not an apostle in Luke's understanding of the term).<sup>35</sup> If other apostles were around in Jerusalem at that time, then Paul's visit to Peter must have been a very private one. We cannot be sure, indeed, what opportunity the church of Jerusalem had had to reorganize itself after the persecution.

But Luke does not suggest that during this visit the church of

<sup>33</sup> That it is the same visit is scarcely to be doubted, although some have denied this; cf. P. Parker, "Once More, Acts and Galatians", *JBL*, lxxxvi (1967), 175-182.

<sup>34</sup> O. Linton, "The Third Aspect: A Neglected Point of View", *Studia Theologica*, iii (1949), 79-95.

<sup>35</sup> Luke normally restricts the term "apostles" to the Twelve; for an exception (Acts 14:4, 14) see n. 40 below.

Jerusalem or its leaders conferred any authority on Paul, and that is the suggestion which Paul is at such pains to deny in Galatians 1:18-20. Those disciples in Jerusalem whom Paul met on this occasion recognized him, after initial misgivings, as a fellow-disciple. They looked after him and took steps for his safety, but even in Luke's account he appears to have acted independently in his witness to Hellenistic Jews during those days. We can easily recognize Paul's motives in relating the visit as he does; it is difficult to recognize any "tendency" in Luke's generalizing narrative. The church probably breathed a collective sigh of relief when Paul set sail for Tarsus; it then got down to the task of rebuilding its communal life.

#### IV

A greater shock to the life of the Jerusalem church was administered by Peter's visit to the house of the Roman centurion Cornelius at Caesarea and its sequel.

According to Luke's arrangement of his narrative, it was not long after Paul's departure for Tarsus and the restoration of peace to the church that Peter visited this Gentile and was invited to preach the gospel to him and his family and friends. Their reception of the message was attended by signs which left Peter with no option but to have Cornelius and the others baptized.<sup>36</sup> This fraternizing with Gentiles caused misgivings among Peter's associates back in Jerusalem, but when Peter gave them a full account of the matter the evidence of divine guidance was such that objections were silenced: the other apostles acquiesced in his action.<sup>37</sup>

In one respect the misgivings were well founded: Peter's action and his colleagues' acquiescence in it lost them much of the popular good will which they had enjoyed until then. It is not surprising that, shortly after this, an attack was launched on the church leaders by Herod Agrippa I, king of the Jews by grace of the Emperor Claudius. Instead of being exempt from molestation, as they had been in the persecution which followed Stephen's death, the apostles were now the principal targets for attack. James the Zebedaeon was executed and Peter would have suffered

<sup>36</sup> Acts 10:17-48.

<sup>37</sup> Acts 11:1-18.

the same fate, but he was kept under armed guard until the passover season was over and was helped to escape just before the day appointed for his public execution. The attack did not last long — a consequence, probably, of Agrippa's unexpected death in March, A.D. 44 — but while it lasted it had the approval of the Jewish leaders.<sup>38</sup>

From this time onwards the undisputed leadership of the church was exercised by James the Just, who continued to enjoy public esteem after Peter and his fellow-apostles lost it. He at any rate was known to have nothing to do with the recent scandalous approach to Gentiles.<sup>39</sup> The transition from the leadership of Peter to the primacy of James is indicated indirectly by Luke when he tells how Peter, on his escape from Agrippa's prison, reported his deliverance to the group that met in the house of Mary, the mother of Mark, and, with the words "Tell this to James and to the brothers", went off to "another place" (Acts 12:17).

## V

The first presentation of the gospel to Gentiles, however, took place informally and almost accidentally in places remote from Jerusalem. One result of the dispersion that followed the death of Stephen was that now, in every region of Palestine and in the adjoining provinces, there were groups of believers in Jesus who had once lived in Jerusalem and were still regarded by the church leaders there as subject to their authority. Such were the groups in Lydda and Joppa which received a visit from Peter when peace returned to the church (Acts 9:32-43).

When the gospel was carried into neighbouring provinces by some of the dispersed Hellenists, the leaders of the Jerusalem church held themselves responsible to supervise its progress. When some of the Hellenists began to evangelize pagans in the North Syrian city of Antioch, they treated the news of this innovative advance so seriously that they sent Barnabas to Antioch to investigate and report back. Barnabas was so impressed by what he found in Antioch that he stayed on there to give the new

<sup>38</sup> Acts 12:1-23.

<sup>39</sup> James appears to have retained this esteem until his death in A.D. 62; his judicial murder at the instance of the high priest Ananus II outraged public opinion (Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20. 200).

movement the direction and encouragement which he saw it needed. But in Antioch, and even farther afield, Barnabas was an emissary (an ἀπόστολος) of the Jerusalem church.<sup>40</sup>

The desire of the Jerusalem church to maintain control over the extension of the Christian way, and Luke's understanding of its authority, may be gathered from his record of the "Council of Jerusalem" in Acts 15:6-29. The designation "Council of Jerusalem" could be misleading if it suggested an ecumenical synod; it was a meeting of the apostles and elders of the church of Jerusalem to consider what policy should be adopted with regard to the rapidly advancing Gentile mission in Antioch and neighbouring parts of the united province of Syria and Cilicia. A few representatives of the church of Antioch were present, but they took no part in deciding on an appropriate policy: their role was confined to the supplying of evidence which the apostles and elders could take into consideration in reaching their decision.

According to Luke's presentation of the order of events, Barnabas and Paul had recently been released by the church of Antioch for missionary work beyond the province of Syria and Cilicia — more particularly, in Cyprus and South Galatia. The fact that they undertook this work as emissaries of the Antiochene church did not deter the Jerusalem authorities from paying serious attention to its wider implications.

The special status of the church of Jerusalem as the mother-church of the expanding Christian mission was recognized outside the bounds of that church. Even Paul, who stoutly resisted any attempt to impose the authority of Jerusalem over his Gentile churches, took care to maintain as friendly relations as possible with Jerusalem. He knew that his apostolic ministry would be abortive if any attempt were made to carry it on in isolation from Jerusalem.

The increase in the number of Gentile converts, even at a considerable distance from Jerusalem and Judaea, made the Jerusalem church give more urgent thought than previously to the conditions on which Gentiles might be recognized as full members of the believing community. If no controls were imposed, the community could be swamped by the influx of new converts from a pagan background, and its whole ethos would be changed — for

<sup>40</sup> But when he and Paul are called ἀπόστολοι in Acts 14:4, 14 (see n. 35 above), Luke refers to them as emissaries of the church of Antioch (Acts 13:2 f.).

the worse. Luke's account of the conversion of Cornelius does not suggest that anything was said to him about circumcision or submission to the law of Moses. But Cornelius was no idolater at the time of his conversion: he already regulated his life by Jewish standards of morality and worship.<sup>41</sup> What was to be done, however, with converts from raw paganism? Cornelius, with his family and friends, formed a small group, in whose favour an exception could easily be made, but Gentile converts in Syria, Cilicia and farther afield were increasing in number all the time. It is not surprising that some members of the Jerusalem church argued that they should be treated in the same way as proselytes from paganism to the Jewish religion — that is, they should be circumcised and charged to keep Moses' law.<sup>42</sup> They should, in other words, become Jews first in order then to receive recognition as Christians by virtue of their belief in Jesus. This view was pressed not only in Jerusalem but also in the church of Antioch.

Those who pressed this view at Antioch were visitors from Jerusalem. It is natural to link them with the "certain persons from James" whose arrival in Antioch led to controversy there over the seating of Jewish and Gentile Christians at separate tables — the controversy described by Paul in a vivid passage in his letter to the churches of Galatia (Galatians 2:11-14). Be that as it may, the situation had to be discussed and resolved at the highest level. The church of Antioch, says Luke, sent a deputation to Jerusalem, headed by Barnabas and Paul, to raise the matter with the apostles and elders. But when this deputation had discussed the matter informally with the Jerusalem leaders, it was the Jerusalem leaders who met to settle the question. Their decision, summed up and put to the meeting by James, was that Gentile converts should not be required to become proselytes to Judaism, but that they should undertake to observe the Jewish code of sexual ethics and the most important Jewish food-restrictions (avoiding in particular the eating of meat from which the blood had not been completely drained and of the flesh of animals which had been sacrificed to pagan divinities).<sup>43</sup>

In view of the pressure to insist on circumcision and submission to the "yoke of the commandments", the Jerusalem decree (as it is

<sup>41</sup> Acts 10:1-4.

<sup>42</sup> Acts 15:1, 5.

<sup>43</sup> Acts 15:19 f., 28 f.

called) was a remarkably liberal document.<sup>44</sup> We need not deal here with the literary-critical judgment that two distinct meetings have been fused into one in Luke's narrative at this point.<sup>45</sup> It is certain, at least, that the decree was issued by the authority of the church of Jerusalem. It was embodied in a letter addressed to the "brothers of Gentile origin" in Antioch and the province of Syria and Cilicia. It claimed even higher authority than that of the church of Jerusalem: "The Holy Spirit has resolved, and so have we", the apostles and elders wrote, "to lay on you no other burden than the following: you must abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood and strangled meat, and from fornication" (Acts 15:28 f.).

Luke implies that the letter was circulated beyond the frontiers of its stated address, in Syria and Cilicia: he represents Paul and his Jerusalemite colleague Silas as communicating its terms to the recently founded churches of South Galatia.<sup>46</sup> When, however, Paul deals in his letters with the issues covered by the Jerusalem decree (especially the issue of food that has been sacrificed to idols), he never appeals to the decree — he does not even mention it — but argues from first principles. The claim implicitly made by the Jerusalem leaders to impose their authority over Gentile Christians — a claim tacitly conceded by Luke — was not allowed by Paul.

## VI

According to Luke, Paul visited the Jerusalem church at the end of each phase of his apostolic mission.<sup>47</sup> This is quite in line with

<sup>44</sup> Martin Hengel sees in the decree evidence of "an astounding magnanimity" on the part of the Jerusalem leaders, for "this bold step necessarily meant defamation for them and persecution by the Jewish majority in Palestine" (*Victory over Violence*, E.T. [London, 1975], p. 87).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. T.W. Manson, *Studies in the Gospels and Epistles* (Manchester, 1962), p. 186 (reprinted from "The Problem of the Epistle to the Galatians", *BULLETIN*, xxiv (1940), 77).

<sup>46</sup> Acts 16:4. For an argument against the authenticity of this verse see A.S. Geysler, "Paul, the Apostolic Decree and the Liberals in Corinth", in *Studia Paulina in honorem J. de Zwaan*, ed. J.N. Sevenster and W.C. van Unnik (Haarlem, 1953), pp. 124-138.

<sup>47</sup> It is argued, however, that Paul paid no visit to Jerusalem between that recorded in Galatians 2:1-10 and his last visit, to deliver the proceeds of the collection (the visit projected in Romans 15:25); cf. J. Knox, *Chapters in a Life of Paul* (London, 1954), pp. 51-60, 85.

Paul's desire to maintain good relations with the mother church. If on each of those visits he reported to the church what had been accomplished through his ministry during the preceding phase (cf. Acts 15:12; 21:19), this was by way of engaging the Jerusalem believers' interest in his ministry, not by way of rendering an account of a commission which he had received from them. Luke himself nowhere suggests that Paul had received any commission from Jerusalem. At the end of his evangelization of Corinth, Paul is said by Luke to have paid a brief visit to Judaea and Syria: "putting in at Caesarea he went up and greeted the church and then went down to Antioch" (Acts 18:22). The church which he greeted was certainly the Jerusalem church (to which one would necessarily "go up" from Caesarea and from which one would "go down" to Antioch).<sup>48</sup> There was no doubt by this time (A.D. 52) a church at Caesarea, but if Luke had meant that Paul on this occasion greeted the Caesarean church, he would have said something like "the church that was there" (τὴν οὖσαν ἐκκλησίαν) and not simply "the church" (τὴν ἐκκλησίαν)<sup>49</sup> — which, especially in a Judaeian context, could only be the church of Jerusalem. So the western text of Acts 18:21 understands the situation: it makes Paul say to the members of the synagogue at Ephesus when he visits them briefly on his way from Corinth, "I must by all means keep the coming festival in Jerusalem" — the festival of Pentecost, probably. Here the western text anticipates the situation a few years later, when Paul, according to the undisputed testimony of Acts 20:16, "made haste to be in Jerusalem, if possible, for the day of Pentecost".

It is this later occasion, some time after the end of Paul's Ephesian ministry, that provides the final and crucial phase of Luke's history of the Jerusalem church. On this, his last, visit to Jerusalem Paul was accompanied by a number of Christians from churches which he himself had planted. The reader of Paul's letters knows why those representatives of Gentile churches came

<sup>48</sup> H.J. Cadbury thought that the Jerusalem church was understood here by most commentators under the influence of the western text of the preceding verse (*Beginnings of Christianity*, I.4 [London, 1933], pp. 230 f.). J. Knox (*Chapters*, pp. 68-70) argues that the visit of Acts 18:22 is identical with that of Galatians 2:1-10; cf. G. Lüdemann, *Paul, Apostle to the Gentiles: Studies in Chronology*, E.T. (London, 1984), p. 149, for "the thesis that Acts 11:27 ff.; 15:1 ff.; and 18:22 are a tripling of Paul's second visit to Jerusalem and that Acts 18:22 represents its original historical location".

<sup>49</sup> As in Acts 11:22; 13:1 (see n. 2).



with Paul on this occasion: they were carrying their respective churches' contributions to the relief fund for the Jerusalem church which Paul had been organizing in his mission-field for two or three years back. It may be said that our knowledge of this fact (which may not have been so directly accessible to Luke's first readers as it is to us) should not influence overmuch our appraisal of Luke's narrative of Paul's last visit to Jerusalem. It does, however, compel us to wonder why Luke is so reticent about Paul's Jerusalem relief fund, which cannot have been unknown to him.<sup>50</sup> His one reference to it comes in his report of Paul's defence before Felix, procurator of Judaea: "After many years", says Paul, "I came to bring alms and offerings to my nation" (Acts 24:19).<sup>51</sup> The explanation of Luke's reticence in this regard must be attempted elsewhere (it may have had something to do with the terms of Paul's indictment before Caesar); here it is Luke's positive picture of the Jerusalem church on this occasion that invites examination.

This time there is no word of Peter or any other of the twelve apostles in Jerusalem. They appear to be no longer based in the city; the church is administered by a body of elders, among whom James is *primus inter pares*, the acknowledged leader. Hospitality in Jerusalem has been arranged in advance for Paul and his companions in the house of Mnason, with whom they would feel at home. The day after their arrival, they were received by James and the elders. Paul gave them an account of the progress of the Gentile mission in the period that had elapsed since his last visit, and they were evidently pleased by what they heard.<sup>52</sup> But they were worried by exaggerated rumours about Paul's liberal policies which were circulating in Jerusalem both inside and outside the church. They had agreed that circumcision and submission to the law of Moses were not to be imposed on Gentile converts, but Paul (it was reported) was telling *Jews* — Jewish Christians, presumably — that they should give up circumcising their sons and observing the other ancestral customs.

<sup>50</sup> "It seems likely that Luke had some knowledge of the offering as a motive for the final journey. ... Luke had good sources, or a good source, for this journey" (J. Knox, *Chapters*, p. 71).

<sup>51</sup> See K. Berger, "Almosen für Israel: Zum historischen Kontext der paulinischen Kollekte", *NTS* xxiii (1976-77), 180-204.

<sup>52</sup> Acts 21:20a ("when they heard it, they glorified God").

These rumours were bound to excite the hostility of the many "zealots for the law" among the believing Jews of Jerusalem (not to mention the Jews of the city as a whole).<sup>53</sup> Something should be done to allay their suspicions: Paul should do something publicly to show that he was still a practising Jew. An opportunity presented itself: four members of the church had undertaken a Nazirite vow and were about to complete certain purificatory rites in the temple in the course of discharging the vow. If Paul were to associate himself with them, accompany them into the temple and pay their dues, then (the elders argued) everyone would recognize that Paul was a pious and observant Jew.<sup>54</sup>

There was an engaging naïveté about their professed expectation, but if that would make life easier for them, Paul would go along with their plan. He knew that his presence in Jerusalem must be an embarrassment to the church and its leaders; he would do anything reasonable to relieve their embarrassment. The action they urged upon him involved no compromise of principle: it was his settled policy to conform to Jewish ways when living among Jews.<sup>55</sup> But the outcome of their plan was disastrous. Some Jews from the province of Asia, who were in Jerusalem for Pentecost, recognized Paul in the temple precincts and raised a hue and cry against him, charging him with violating the sanctity of the place by bringing into it one or more of his Gentile friends whom they had seen with him in the city.<sup>56</sup> Paul was set upon, and rescued from being beaten to death by the timely arrival of Roman

<sup>53</sup> J. Munck, "without any authority in the manuscript[s]", as he acknowledged, proposed to delete the words "of those who have believed" (τῶν πεπιστευκότων) from Acts 21:20b, reading in consequence: "how many myriads there are in Judaea; they are all zealots for the law" — the reference being to Jews in general, not Jewish Christians in particular (*Paul and the Salvation of Mankind*, E.T. [London, 1959], pp. 240 f.; cf. his *The Acts of the Apostles*, Anchor Bible [Garden City, N.Y., 1967], p. 209). The same deletion was proposed, on different grounds, by F.C. Baur (*Paul: His Life and Works*, E.T., i [London, 1876], pp. 201-204).

<sup>54</sup> To pay the expenses of Nazirites who were discharging their vows was a charitable act: Herod Agrippa I contributed to his reputation for piety by paying the expenses of many Nazirites (Josephus, *Ant.*, 19.294).

<sup>55</sup> Cf. 1 Corinthians 9:20. According to Acts 18:18, Paul had undertaken a Nazirite vow on his own behalf some years before (the construction is ambiguous, but the reference is more probably to Paul than to Aquila).

<sup>56</sup> Acts 21:27-29. The leader of these Asian Jews may have been "Alexander the coppersmith", who did Paul "great harm" (2 Timothy 4:14), if he is to be identified with Alexander, a Jew of Ephesus mentioned in Acts 19:33.

soldiers from the adjoining Antonia fortress. The sequel is well known: Paul was arraigned before the Roman procurator, appealed to Caesar, was sent under guard to Rome and was detained there for two years while he waited for his appeal to come up before the supreme court.

## VII

Luke, describing how Paul's assailants dragged him into the outer court of the temple, adds "and immediately the gates were shut" (Acts 21:30).<sup>57</sup> In this detail the Bampton Lecturer for 1864 saw symbolic significance:

'Believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets', and 'having committed nothing against the people or customs of [his] fathers', he and his creed are forced from their proper home. On it as well as him the Temple doors are shut.<sup>58</sup>

This was the moment when, in Luke's eyes, the temple ceased to fill the role allotted to it in his history up to this point. The exclusion of God's message and his messenger from the house formerly called by his name sealed its doom: it was now ripe for the destruction which overtook it not many years later. Luke does not say so in express words, but he implies it. Here is the resolution of the tension referred to above between two attitudes to the temple — that reflected in Jesus' proclamation of the temple's doom and that reflected in the apostles' continued respect for the building and its services.<sup>59</sup>

But the material temple was to be replaced by a new temple, "not made with hands".<sup>60</sup> There are hints of an early tradition identifying the church of Jerusalem with this new temple, and James the Just as its high priest. (This could explain, for example,

<sup>57</sup> The "gates" (θύραι) were those leading from the inner courts (the sacred area proper) down into the outer court (cf. Mishnah, *Middoth*, 1:4, 5).

<sup>58</sup> T.D. Bernard, *The Progress of Doctrine in the New Testament* (London, 1900), p. 121.

<sup>59</sup> See p. 648 above.

<sup>60</sup> See n. 26 above. When James, Cephas and John are said to have been reputed as "pillars" in the Jerusalem church (Galatians 2:9), this probably means that they were reckoned to be pillars in the new temple, not made with hands (see C.K. Barrett, "Paul and the 'Pillar' Apostles", in *Studia Paulina in honorem J. de Zwaan*, ed. J.J.N. Sevenster and W.C. van Unnik, pp. 1-19).

the curious statement of Hegesippus that "to James alone it was permitted to enter the sanctuary, for he did not wear wool but linen".<sup>61</sup>) This concept finds no place in Acts. But what is the place of the church of Jerusalem in Paul's expulsion from the temple precincts and its aftermath?

The hope of James and his fellow-elders that Paul's public involvement in a ceremony of purification in the temple would disarm suspicion and hostility was so unrealistically optimistic that doubts have been raised about their sincerity in proposing the scheme. Did they really expect their plan to work? According to some readers of Acts, they did not, and Luke knew that they did not. A few go so far as to suggest that, by this plan, they deliberately lured Paul into a trap which, they hoped, would relieve them of his embarrassing presence.<sup>62</sup>

Luke can be quite selective in his presentation of evidence, but there is no need to charge him with such a *suggestio falsi* as this suggestion implies. Luke leaves the ordinary reader of his account with the impression that James and his colleagues were a body of well-meaning but deeply troubled men. But even if their scheme was well-intentioned and put forward in all good faith, they could not so easily be absolved from responsibility for Paul's exposure to danger and loss of liberty. Luke's last portrayal of the church of Jerusalem in Acts brings it little glory. Like the Jerusalem temple, the Jerusalem church had outlived its role in the divine purpose. As the temple was to be destroyed, so the church was to be uprooted and scattered in a few years' time. By the time Luke wrote, both events had taken place, and he had pondered their significance.

What now was to replace the church of Jerusalem in the outworking of the divine purpose?

<sup>61</sup> Cited by Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.*, 2.23.6. Cf. A. Ehrhardt, *The Apostolic Succession* (London, 1953), pp. 64 f.

<sup>62</sup> So A. J. Mattill, "The Purpose of Acts: Schneckenburger reconsidered", in *Apostolic History and the Gospel*, ed. W.W. Gasque and R.P. Martin (Exeter, 1970), pp. 115 f.; Y.M. Park, "The Effect of Contemporary Conditions in the Jerusalem Church on the Writing of the Epistle to the Romans" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1979), pp. 204-213, 310-321. J.D.G. Dunn suggests that, if James and his colleagues did not refuse to accept the collection, they postponed acceptance of it until Paul, by adopting their proposed course of action, "had proved his good Jewish faith" (*Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* [London, 1977], p. 257).

In the Manson Memorial Lecture for 1981 it was argued (in pursuance of a thesis earlier defended by Henry Chadwick)<sup>63</sup> that in Paul's eyes Rome was designed to replace Jerusalem as the centre of the Christian mission (and to inherit his own apostolic responsibility).<sup>64</sup> Luke's perspective was different from Paul's but from Luke's perspective too, as Jerusalem Christianity was henceforth unable to fulfil God's saving purpose in the world, it was for Roman Christianity to take up the task and carry it forward. Rome is the goal of Luke's narrative, as he indicates in advance towards the end of his record of Paul's Ephesian ministry when he tells how Paul announced his intention of paying a visit to Jerusalem, adding, "After I have been there, I must also see Rome" (Acts 19:21). The remainder of Acts shows how this plan of Paul's was realized, and Luke rests content when he has brought Paul to Rome and leaves him there, at the heart of the empire, preaching the gospel without let or hindrance (Acts 28:30f.). "Victory of the word of God", comments J.A. Bengel on the closing sentence of Luke's narrative: "Paul in Rome, the capstone of the gospel, the end of Acts. ... It began in Jerusalem; it ends in Rome".<sup>65</sup>

Christianity has come to Rome and found a secure lodgement there: now let it work. But during the preceding twenty-five to thirty years the church of Jerusalem had served as the fountain-head on earth from which the gospel flowed forth,<sup>66</sup> and by virtue of its prestige as the mother-church it exercised supervision over the continuous expansion of the new community first into the adjoining regions and then into territories more remote.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>63</sup> H. Chadwick, "The Circle and the Ellipse" (Oxford inaugural lecture, 1959, reprinted in H. von Campenhausen and H. Chadwick, *Jerusalem and Rome* [Philadelphia, 1966], pp. 21-36).

<sup>64</sup> F. F. Bruce, "The Romans Debate — Continued", *BULLETIN*, lxiv (1981-82), 334-359.

<sup>65</sup> J.A. Bengel, *Gnomon Novi Testamenti* ([1742] London, 1862), p. 489: "Victoria Verbi Dei. Paulus Romae, apex evangelii, Actorum finis. ... Hierosolymis coepit; Romae desinit". I apologize to students for trying to turn Bengel into English, but in a public lecture it is probably advisable. I heartily agree with James Denney that it is an *impoverishment* for students to be offered a *translation* of Bengel.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Isaiah 2:3, "Out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem", with a discussion of its relevance to the apostolic church in B. Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript* (Lund, 1961), pp. 273-280.

<sup>67</sup> Other aspects of the subject of this lecture were dealt with by the late G.W.H. Lampe in his Ethel M. Wood lecture *St. Luke and the Church of Jerusalem* (London, 1969).