

## *Jerusalem in the Early Christian Centuries*

**Peter Walker**

[p. 79]

### **I. The questions before us**

For the orthodox Christian in any age faith in Christ necessarily entails the further conviction that the eternal God has acted redemptively for the world in a unique way in a Middle Eastern city called Jerusalem. God has been involved with Jerusalem in a special way. Moreover the scriptures speak much about this city, seeing it sometimes as a place of God's special blessing, sometimes as the object of his judgement.<sup>1</sup> This raises several questions of a truly 'theological' nature (enquiring into the very will of God) which, though difficult to formulate exactly, are of great importance:

a) Did Jerusalem have some special 'status' in God's sight during some or all of the Old Testament period? Was this a status dependent on the existence within Jerusalem of the Temple?

b) How, if at all, has this status been changed by the events of the New Testament located in and around Jerusalem (the Incarnation, the Cross, the Resurrection, the Ascension, the beginnings of the Church, and the prophesied judgement upon the city realised in AD 70)?

c) Does Jerusalem have any such special status in God's purposes now or for the future, or is this all a thing of the past? Clearly such an intriguing city will have many historical associations and memories relating to salvation-history, but such associations are strictly a different consideration from these theological questions as to the hard-to-fathom relationship between this city and God himself. Yet such questions cannot be escaped by any Christian who believes in the genuine involvement of the eternal God in his world, his self-consistency and his authoritative revelation of his will through the scriptures. How does God view Jerusalem? What is his will for that city in the here and now? It is these questions

[p.80]

that are in mind whenever we refer below to the 'theological significance' of Jerusalem.

These questions are indeed those which underlie all the contributions in this volume. Here, however, our concern is this: When this matter was given consideration by the theologians of the Early Church, what were their conclusions? During this period was there but one view or were there several? If more than one, what were the reasons for these different opinions, and what were the methods which were used to justify them theologically? Moreover, since Christians today are engaged in the same enterprise and confronted with the same scriptures, a further question may be asked: is there anything which can be learnt from the methods and conclusions

---

<sup>1</sup> See above, chs. 2 and 3.

Peter Walker, "Jerusalem in the Early Christian Centuries" P.W.L.Walker, ed., *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*. Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1992. Pbk. ISBN: 0951835610. pp.79-97.

of these Early Church Fathers which, even in our own very different circumstances, will help us to formulate an authentic Christian 'theology' of Jerusalem for today?

## II. Why Eusebius and Cyril?

Our attention will be given almost exclusively to the writings of just two people: Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260 - 339) and Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 320 - ?386), important bishops in Palestine in the period close to the coming of Constantine to the East (in 324). There are two chief reasons for this apparently narrow selection.

First, there are very few references to this question of Jerusalem's theological significance in the previous three centuries. Christian writers naturally refer quite frequently to Jerusalem as known through the Bible, but seldom do they then pause to consider the consequences of those biblical events and statements on the surviving city of Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> The very nature of the subject, despite its importance, means that it will chiefly be of concern only for those who are currently involved with the continuing city of Jerusalem; yet of those Christians who lived and taught in and around Jerusalem in those early.

[p.81]

centuries few written works have survived.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, in any age the theological significance of Jerusalem is a subject which is necessarily of secondary importance when compared to the primary questions of Christian doctrine and living. Given the comparative weakness of the Christian church in Palestine between AD 70 and 325 and the general shift in focus away from Palestine in the thought and mission of the Church, it is not surprising that the issue did not truly surface in Christian theology until this later date:<sup>4</sup> it remained low on the theological agenda until the events in the fourth century brought it, quite suddenly, to the fore.

Secondly, it was precisely the emergence of Constantine and the 'Christian Empire' within the lifetime of both Eusebius and Cyril which brought the issue into the limelight: new possibilities, previously unthinkable, emerged for Jerusalem. For example, would it not be fitting to mark appropriately those sites associated with the life and work of Christ, now recognised as the true King by so many thousands throughout the world? Moreover, could not this powerful symbol, Jerusalem, be harnessed to bolster the new order? - could not a Christian Jerusalem be the flagship for the new Christian empire? The existence of a Christian emperor on the throne meant

---

<sup>2</sup> The only possible exceptions occur in Tertullian (*Adv. Marc.* 3.25), Justin Martyr (*Dialogue with Trypho* 80-81) and Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.* 5.32-6) when they consider Palestine as a probable scene for the Second Coming, but they do not in these passages evaluate the status of Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup> Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* is our chief source for extracts from Hegesippus (*EH.* 3:20, 32; 4:22) and Julius Africanus (*EH.* 1:6.2, 7.1ff.; 6:31), but in none of these is our question addressed.

<sup>4</sup> For the weakness of the Jerusalem church, see J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem as Jesus knew it* (London, 1978) 176; for a general history of the Jerusalem church in this period, see e.g. W. Telfer, *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa* (London, 1955) 54-63. The universal outlook of the Church is seen clearly in Eusebius himself, though a native of Palestine, with his continual emphasis on the Gospel having gone out to the 'ends of the earth': see e.g. *Comm. in Psalms*. [68.81, 677c; *Comm. in Isaiah*. [42.101, 272.17 ff.; *Proph. Eclg.*, 2.10. Rome, Alexandria and Antioch were clearly more central within Christianity throughout this period.

Peter Walker, "Jerusalem in the Early Christian Centuries" P.W.L.Walker, ed., *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*. Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1992. Pbk. ISBN: 0951835610. pp.79-97.

that the time had come at last when, if Christians so desired, they could put their hand to the development of a new 'Christian Jerusalem' in both word and deed. For this reason the year 324/5, on this matter as on others, is of pivotal importance. An entirely new approach to Jerusalem became possible, replacing any former notions: it is this clash between the old and the new that can be seen quite clearly in a study of Eusebius and Cyril.

[p.82]

### III. Their contrasting views

Eusebius, probably the 'most learned man' and the 'greatest scholar' of his day,<sup>5</sup> a prolific writer both as a historian of the Church and as a apologist of the faith, and (from 313) the metropolitan ('presiding') bishop of Palestine, was already around the age of sixty-five when Constantine came to power in the East. The essential shape of his theology, reflecting the work of a life-time, had therefore been established long before; in all his works prior to 325 we are hearing the mature reflection of the pre-Constantinian church.<sup>6</sup> As a native of Palestine, moreover, trained in the Christian school founded by Origen in Caesarea<sup>7</sup> and by temperament interested in Palestine's history, Eusebius not surprisingly presents us with our first extant reflection on this local issue, concerning Jerusalem. What were his conclusions in his writings before 325? Did Jerusalem continue to have some abiding 'theological significance'?<sup>8</sup>

Eusebius answered decisively in the negative. The days of Jerusalem's elevated status within God's purposes were over. If such a status had truly pertained in the Old Testament period (though he wondered if more truly this status should have been ascribed simply to the Temple),<sup>9</sup> then the events of the New Testament clearly changed all that: the rejection by Jerusalem of her true Messiah led inevitably on God's side to a divine rejection of Jerusalem which was apparently final: 'the

[p.83]

Church of God has been raised up in place of Jerusalem that is fallen never to rise again';<sup>10</sup> 'when you shall see [the city] besieged by armies, know that which comes upon it to be the final and full desolation and destruction'.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> For such descriptions of Eusebius, see e.g. F.J. Foakes-Jackson, *Eusebius Pamphili* (Cambridge, 1933) 44, 133; L.I. Levine, *Caesarea under Roman Rule* (Leiden, 1975) 126; G.F. Chesnut, *The First Christian Histories* (Paris, 1978) 245.

<sup>6</sup> This is the central thesis of T.D. Barnes in *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA, 1981); for his chronology of Eusebius' life and works, see pp. 277-9.

<sup>7</sup> Eusebius' personal admiration for Origen is seen throughout his works, especially in *EH*. 6; yet his historical interests will have introduced an inevitable tension with Origen's 'spiritualizing' approach: see e.g. T.D. Barnes, *op.cit.*, 94-105 and L.I. Levine, *op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> The following summaries of Eusebius and Cyril are based on an examination of all their works: full primary references will be found in my work *Holy City, Holy Places? Christian Attitudes to Jerusalem and the Holy land in the fourth century* (OUP, 1990, hereafter *HCHP*), esp. chs. 2, 10,11.

<sup>9</sup> See esp. *Theoph.* 4.19 and passages discussed in *HCHP*, 376-83.

<sup>10</sup> *DE*. 6:18.26, as translated in W.J. Ferrar, *The Proof of the Gospel II* (London, 1920) 31.

<sup>11</sup> *Theoph.* 4.20, as translated in S. Lee, *Eusebius on the Theophaneia* (Cambridge, 1843) 251.

Peter Walker, "Jerusalem in the Early Christian Centuries" P.W.L.Walker, ed., *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*. Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1992. Pbk. ISBN: 0951835610. pp.79-97.

Moreover, the whole spirituality of the New Testament was one which was less concerned with physical realities and instead looked upwards to the 'heavenly Jerusalem'.<sup>12</sup> As an apologist Eusebius was concerned that Christianity should offer a distinctive spirituality from Judaism it had need preserve such priorities and not suddenly manifest a more 'Jewish' interest in the earthly Jerusalem.<sup>13</sup> Indeed within the scriptures themselves there were warnings against a too simplistic adulation of Jerusalem and of using its powerful symbolic function for less than noble ends. No, the city of Jerusalem might be of great interest from a historical point of view (hence his references, for example, to the 'throne of James the Lord's brother'),<sup>14</sup> but theologically its significance in the present and for the future was nil.

The adherent of such views (common as they were, no doubt, in the years up to the time of writing) would naturally need to examine the whole question afresh after the dramatic events of 324/5! Suddenly Christians emerged with potential power over Jerusalem and almost immediately the new emperor expressed a keen personal interest in the fate of Jerusalem.<sup>15</sup> Could such negative views survive in the new

[p.84]

positive atmosphere? Would the detractors of Jerusalem be given a hearing in the sudden rush of Christian enthusiasm for Jerusalem and the Holy Land?<sup>16</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, the last fourteen years of Eusebius' life were extremely busy; for, on this as on other issues, the essentials of his life's thought had to be re-examined and re-stated in ways appropriate to the new circumstances.<sup>17</sup> Charting these changes is regrettably beyond our present purpose but to do so makes for some truly fascinating discoveries.<sup>18</sup> Suffice it to say, however, that though there are clarifications and minor adjustments in his thought, the overall negative thrust in his approach to Jerusalem remains predominant. In a key passage, for example, which refers explicitly to the new church of the Holy Sepulchre and which therefore needs to be read

---

<sup>12</sup> Eusebius loved, for example, the story of the Egyptian martyrs who, when questioned by the governor of Caesarea as to their homeland, replied 'Jerusalem', referring to the 'heavenly Jerusalem' (*Mart. Pal.* 11.6-13). This exhibited for him the essential outlook of the pre-Constantinian Church.

<sup>13</sup> See below section IV (2)

<sup>14</sup> *EH.* 7.19.

<sup>15</sup> Constantine never succeeded in visiting the Holy Land; but such a visit was probably in his mind in 324/5 (see *VC.* 2:72.2) and later he expressed his unfulfilled wish of being baptized in the River Jordan (*VC.* 4:62.2). Instead he acceded quickly to the wishes of Macarius, bishop of Jerusalem, who most probably approached the emperor at the Council of Nicaea to obtain permission for the removal of the pagan temple over the traditional site of Christ's tomb; Constantine's subsequent correspondence with Macarius is recorded in *VC.* 3:30-2; see *HCHP*, 275 ff.

<sup>16</sup> The 'travelogue' of the Bordeaux Pilgrim, dating to 333, can be taken as probable evidence of the new spate of pilgrimage in the years after 325. Before this time we know the names of only a few pilgrims (if Melito, Alexander and Pionius are to be seen as such) and, though the 'volume of devout tourism must have been much greater than these isolated examples suggest' (H. Chadwick, 'The Circle and the Ellipse' in *Variorum Reprints* (1982) 7) it seems not to have been a widespread phenomenon in this earlier period: see *HCHP*, 11-14 and J. Wilkinson, *op. cit.*, 33f.

<sup>17</sup> See *HCHP*, 94-99, where it is suggested that Eusebius' embarrassment after his fairly humiliating experience at the Council of Nicaea (almost being outlawed for 'heresy') will have given him an even greater incentive to prove the value of his life's work; the *Theophaneia* may have been written as a summary of his essential thought to ward off potential critics.

<sup>18</sup> See instead *HCHP*, 93-116.

Peter Walker, "Jerusalem in the Early Christian Centuries" P.W.L.Walker, ed., *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*. Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1992. Pbk. ISBN: 0951835610. pp.79-97.

alongside the more oft-quoted chapters in the *Life of Constantine* relating to that church, Eusebius repeats his affirmation that the physical Jerusalem is not to be thought of as a 'holy city'.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, in his speech delivered at the opening ceremonies of the church of the Holy Sepulchre he deliberately focused attention away from the physical tomb to the powerful witness of the universal Church.<sup>20</sup> Despite the new, and no doubt welcome,

[p.85]

circumstances, Eusebius' thinking remained essentially the same.<sup>21</sup>

Cyril, by contrast, approaching the subject afresh, as a child of the new era, was able to come to quite different conclusions. In his *Catechetical Lectures*, delivered in 348, though the issue was never addressed directly as such, Cyril's new and wholeheartedly positive approach to Jerusalem and its theological significance is unmistakably clear.<sup>22</sup>

Any divine judgement on Jerusalem, he asserts, was a thing of the past and was certainly not 'final'.<sup>23</sup> In any case such judgement had really been focused either on the Temple alone (the 'Temple of the *Jews*')<sup>24</sup> or on the Jewish Jerusalem which had rejected him, not on the Christian Jerusalem: '*that Jerusalem crucified Christ, but that which now is worships him*'.<sup>25</sup> Cyril's contemporary Jerusalem was therefore, on the one hand, quite a different entity from the Jewish Jerusalem of the first century. On the other hand, it could draw a line of continuity back to all that was true and best of the Jerusalem in the scriptures: hence, for example, several prophecies in Isaiah concerning Jerusalem (Isa.1:26-7, 60:1, 65:18) could be applied directly to Cyril's own baptismal candidates;<sup>26</sup> moreover, it

[p.86]

was here that both Christ and the Holy Spirit had 'descended from heaven'.<sup>27</sup>

What, however, about Jerusalem's treatment of Jesus resulting in the crucifixion? Had that affected Jerusalem's status in God's sight? Cyril would have turned this argument on its head by

---

<sup>19</sup> *Comm. in Psa.* [87.11-13], 1064b.

<sup>20</sup> In his book *In Praise of Constantine* (Berkeley, 1976) H.A. Drake has argued convincingly that this speech at the Dedication of the Holy Sepulchre can be found in *de Laudibus Constantini*, 11-18. For the important insight this gives us into Eusebius' thinking concerning Jerusalem and 'holy places' in his final years, see *HCHP*, 114-16.

<sup>21</sup> His reference to the 'New Jerusalem' (*VC*. 3.33), which is often raised in this regard, is actually his description of the church of the Holy Sepulchre, not of Constantinian Jerusalem. As such it in fact only endorses our contention that Eusebius was reluctant to give any special status to the city as a whole (see *e.g.* *HCHP*, 281).

<sup>22</sup> Some scholars prefer a date of 350 (as discussed in *HCHP*, 410), but this little matters here. Since the *Mystagogical Lectures*, commonly attributed to Cyril, may well come from the generation after his death (see *HCHP*, 410-11), they have been excluded from this examination into Cyril's thinking; however, in Egeria's narrative of her stay in Jerusalem (c. 384-7) we have a clear witness of a different kind to the way in which Cyril's liturgical vision for Jerusalem had developed by the end of his episcopate.

<sup>23</sup> The following presentation of Cyril's thinking on Jerusalem is a summary of *HCHP*, ch. 8.

<sup>24</sup> *Catech.* 15.15 (italics mine).

<sup>25</sup> *Catech.* 13.7 (italics mine).

<sup>26</sup> *Catech.* 18.34.

<sup>27</sup> *Catech.* 16.4.

Peter Walker, "Jerusalem in the Early Christian Centuries" P.W.L.Walker, ed., *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*. Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1992. Pbk. ISBN: 0951835610. pp.79-97.

developing the Johannine teaching concerning the Cross as truly the revelation of Christ's 'glory': the Cross was a 'crown, not a dishonour' and the 'glory of glories' for the worldwide Church.<sup>28</sup> Jesus may have been expelled from Jerusalem in the first century to be crucified outside its walls, but the site of Golgotha was now (providentially, no doubt) at the very heart of the Constantinian city and very much to the greater glory of Jerusalem.<sup>29</sup> No, the fact that this salvific event, combined with the other events of the Incarnation,<sup>30</sup> had occurred in Jerusalem and nowhere else could only mean one thing: Jerusalem had been, and still was, a city of special significance in God's sight.

Hence Cyril pointedly refers to his contemporary Jerusalem as a 'holy city'. Referring to the strange event in the Passion-narrative (unique to Matthew 27:53) when the 'saints who had fallen asleep were raised and... went into the holy city', Cyril takes exception to the view espoused by Eusebius and others before him that Matthew's 'holy city' is a reference to 'heaven', and asserts instead that Matthew was clearly speaking of 'this city in which we are now'.<sup>31</sup> Jerusalem was truly a 'holy city' in a theological sense, special to God and not simply to the faithful through its many historical associations.<sup>32</sup> As a result Cyril then felt able to claim for his city of Jerusalem that it should be given a natural 'pre-eminence' (ἄξιωμα) in the

[p.87]

life of faith, in the Church, in the Holy land, and indeed within the whole world.<sup>33</sup>

The views of Eusebius and Cyril are therefore far removed from one another, if not in mutual contradiction. One denied Jerusalem the status of a 'holy city' in God's sight, the other categorically asserted it. As in our own very different times, the adherents of these two seemingly incompatible standpoints were both able to appeal to the Scriptures as the ultimate authority for their views. Hence it is necessary to enquire more deeply into their reasoning and into their methods. What drove them to these quite different conclusions and what hermeneutical framework did they use to justify their views from Scripture?

---

<sup>28</sup> *Catech.* 13.22, 13.1.

<sup>29</sup> See *HCHP*, 328.

<sup>30</sup> He draws attention to the fact that the Ascension (*Catech.* 14.23), the descent of the Spirit (*Catech.* 16.4, 17.13, 16.26) and the institution of the Eucharist (*Catech.* 18.33) all occurred in Jerusalem, and also notes that 'all Jerusalem' (Mark 1.5) went to the Jordan for John's baptism (*Catech.* 3.7).

<sup>31</sup> *Catech.* 14.16, in contrast to Eusebius (Comm. in *Psa.* [87:11-13], 1064b) and Origen (Comm. in *Matt.* [17:1-2], 12:43, 169:5-7).

<sup>32</sup> As argued in *HCHP*, 325-30.

<sup>33</sup> Cyril uses the word ἄξιωμα on three separate occasions (*Catech.* 3.7, 16.4, 17.13); presumably it was no coincidence that this was the very word which had been used twenty years earlier by the Nicene fathers (Canon 7) in their attempt to preserve for Eusebius and subsequent bishops of Caesarea a 'distinctive pre-eminence' over the see of Jerusalem: see *A New Eusebius*, ed., J. Stevenson, London, 1957) 360. *C.f.* *HCHP*, 330-346 for the way Cyril develops this theme of 'pre-eminence'; note especially how in *Catech.* 13.28 he describes Golgotha as the 'very centre of the world' (based on an interpretation of *Psa.* 74:12).

Peter Walker, "Jerusalem in the Early Christian Centuries" P.W.L.Walker, ed., *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*. Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1992. Pbk. ISBN: 0951835610. pp.79-97.

## IV. Their Reasons

### 1. Contemporary circumstances

Theological thinking can rarely, if ever, be done in a vacuum; a theologian's context invariably results in certain theological truths receiving greater emphasis than others. If this is true today, as people respond variously to the realities of Israel / Palestine, it was no less true in the fourth century for Eusebius and Cyril.

For Eusebius, formulating his ideas at the end of the third century, the pitiable physical state of Jerusalem would inevitably influence his understanding of its possible theological status. After the devastation of the city by the Romans in both AD 70 and 135, the garrison-town that remained was called 'Aelia Capitolina', a pagan name which Christians used apparently without any qualms.<sup>34</sup> It was

[p.88]

indeed in a sorry state, with probably no defending walls, and the Temple area left in complete ruins.<sup>35</sup> An edict of Hadrian forbade any 'circumcized person' from even setting eyes on the town, thus leaving it devoid of any Jewish population;<sup>36</sup> meanwhile the Christians were a tiny minority, possibly meeting in a small church on Mount Zion and preserving in a small library a (not very reliable) record of the church's bishops since the time of James.<sup>37</sup> Any Christians who visited had the custom of going primarily to the Mount of Olives and viewing this sorry spectacle which only confirmed the truth of those prophetic words spoken by Jesus in that self-same place warning of the coming judgement:

believers in Christ... congregate, not as of old time because of the glory of Jerusalem, nor that they may worship in the ancient Temple at Jerusalem, but they rest there that they may learn about the city being taken and devastated as the prophets foretold.<sup>38</sup>

In such circumstances it would only be natural for Eusebius to approach Jerusalem in a negative light. In one sense, after all, there was now no such place as 'Jerusalem'! Instead its current forlorn state only gave emphasis to that strand in scripture of divine judgement,

---

<sup>34</sup> The Roman city changed its name and is called Aelia' (Eusebius, *EH*. 4:6.4, italics mine). For Eusebius' use of the name 'Aelia' see *HCHP*, 5, n.9, and 394-6; 'Aelia' is also used in the seventh Canon of Nicaea (*loc. cit.*) but never by Cyril.

<sup>35</sup> For the geography and condition of Aelia in this period, see Y. Tsafir, 'Jerusalem', in *RBK*, III, 543-51.

<sup>36</sup> M. Avi-Yonah in *The Jews of Palestine* (Oxford, 1976) reconstructs the wording of the edict as follows: 'It is forbidden for all circumcized persons to enter or stay within the territory of Aelia Capitolina; any person contravening this prohibition shall be put to death'. For the continuing discussion, suggesting that the edict was still on the statute book, but not necessarily enforced, see *HCHP*, 8, n.12.

<sup>37</sup> For the Christian community worshipping on Mt Zion, see E.D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1982) 19, and *HCHP*, 287. Eusebius refers to the Episcopal lists in *EH*. 4.5.3-5 and 5.12.1-2.

<sup>38</sup> *DE*. 6.18, translated by Ferrar.

Peter Walker, "Jerusalem in the Early Christian Centuries" P.W.L.Walker, ed., *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*. Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1992. Pbk. ISBN: 0951835610. pp.79-97.

suggesting that God had acted in a full and final form to exert his judgement upon the city and all that 'Jerusalem' stood for.

Moreover, Eusebius was not only a resident of the flourishing and cosmopolitan city of Caesarea on the coast but also the Metropolitan bishop of the entire province of Palestine with jurisdiction over the bishop of Aelia. Relations between

[p.89]

the sees had generally been good through the previous century,<sup>39</sup> but there are some indications that even before 325 the Jerusalem church had begun to seek a greater standing in relation to the see of Caesarea.<sup>40</sup> This was certainly the case from 325 onwards as Constantine did business on occasions directly with Macarius, the bishop of Aelia<sup>41</sup> and as the new Constantinian churches attracted an increasing number of pilgrims. In such circumstances the one person who might suffer adversely from this new imperial interest in Jerusalem was ironically Eusebius himself, whose metropolitan status as the bishop of Caesarea would now come into question: surely the metropolitan should instead be the bishop of Jerusalem? In the course of history such arguments would eventually prevail,<sup>42</sup> but Eusebius evidently did his best to stem the tide: for example, despite his many references to the Jerusalem church in his writings before 325, he succeeded in referring to it only once in his writings after that date, thus drawing attention away from this 'rival' church.<sup>43</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, when Eusebius came to consider the theological status of Jerusalem, he had every personal reason for playing down its significance.

Eusebius had made no secret of his negative attitude towards Jerusalem: it comes through as one of the recurrent themes in his *Proof of the Gospel* (written in the 310's). It would therefore be far from easy, if he so wished, publicly to alter his position once Constantine came to power and new possibilities emerged for Jerusalem; to do so with theological consistency would have been impossible, and there is ample evidence that one of Eusebius' prime concerns in the years of

[p.90]

flux after 325 was precisely to argue for the need for continuity in the Christian tradition and to avoid any rash abandonment of the old in favour of the new.<sup>44</sup> What was true for the thinking of the Church

---

<sup>39</sup> As evidenced in numerous passages in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*.

<sup>40</sup> See Z. Rubin, 'The Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the conflict between the sees of Caesarea and Jerusalem' in L.I. Levine, ed., *Jerusalem Cathedral II* (Jerusalem and Detroit, 1982) 79-105.

<sup>41</sup> Constantine's letter to Macarius is preserved in Eus., VC. 3.30; see also *HCHP*, 276 ff.

<sup>42</sup> Jerusalem was eventually elevated to the status of a Patriarchate at the Council of Chalcedon in AD 451 during the episcopate of Bishop Juvenal.

<sup>43</sup> This one occasion was when introducing Constantine's letter to Macarius (*loc. cit.*), a letter of great importance which he could hardly omit from the emperor's biography.

<sup>44</sup> See *HCHP*, 94ff. for Eusebius' natural conservatism in these years, especially after his humiliating experience at the Council of Nicaea; if this position is correct, it confirms a central contention of T.D. Barnes in *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, MA, 1981) that the essential contours of Eusebius' theology had been established long before the emergence of the Christian empire.

Peter Walker, "Jerusalem in the Early Christian Centuries" P.W.L.Walker, ed., *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*. Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1992. Pbk. ISBN: 0951835610. pp.79-97.

as a whole would be even more true for the thinking of Eusebius himself. As a result, though there would have been a natural temptation in the Constantinian climate to avow a more positive approach to Jerusalem, Eusebius had strong personal reasons, both theological and ecclesiastical, for resisting the temptation.

For Cyril, however, speaking thirty years later for the new generation in the new Christian empire, all the contemporary circumstances pointed in the opposite direction. He was himself the bishop of Jerusalem,<sup>45</sup> naturally anxious to increase his see's importance, and the new wave of pilgrims called forth a new understanding of this central city in salvation-history. Moreover, the emerging Christian empire needed powerful symbols of the new order, which Jerusalem could provide in a unique way.

The 'Jerusalem mystique' was present and powerful, the potential of the city inviting, the presence of the pilgrims demanding and the possible increased status of the Jerusalem Church compelling.<sup>46</sup>

Different circumstances thus called forth from Cyril a different theology, but one, of course, which he would claim to be equally biblical and authentically Christian.

Evidently, therefore, both Eusebius and Cyril were much affected by the situations in which they did their theology. In our own day, we must ask, what are the chief influences upon us from our own circumstances, and how can awareness of these help us to be more critical of our supposedly 'biblical' approaches to this subject?

[p.91]

## 2. Spirituality

Cyril's positive attitude towards Jerusalem was based in part on a new emphasis in his spirituality on the Incarnation. Cyril marvelled, in a way which Eusebius did not, at the mystery of this event, and the vision of Christ which he presented to his catechumens was very much that of Christ incarnate, not so much the exalted Christ in glory. Eusebius had focused on the concept of Christ as the Eternal Logos to such an extent that he has in modern times been accused of being 'unable to make the Incarnation central in his theology';<sup>47</sup> Cyril, by contrast, encouraged his hearers in many passages to take comfort from the divine identification with humanity shown in the Incarnation:

The perfect teacher of children became himself a child among children, that he might instruct the unwise. The bread of heaven came down to earth to feed the hungry.<sup>48</sup>

This emphasis on God's work in the Incarnation then gave legitimacy to a more 'sacramental' approach both to Jerusalem and to all the 'holy places' touched by the feet of God incarnate. 'Here'

---

<sup>45</sup> The death of Maximus, his predecessor, is normally dated to AD 348; if the *Catechetical Lectures* were delivered in that same year Cyril may have been asked to deliver them on Maximus' behalf as his probable successor.

<sup>46</sup> *HCHP*, 314.

<sup>47</sup> G.H. Williams, 'Christology and Church-State Relations in the Fourth Century', *Church History* 20/3 (Sept. 1951) 17.

<sup>48</sup> *Catech.* 12.1.

Peter Walker, "Jerusalem in the Early Christian Centuries" P.W.L.Walker, ed., *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*. Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1992. Pbk. ISBN: 0951835610. pp.79-97.

(ἐνταῦθα) and nowhere else had occurred the Incarnation and the Ascension.<sup>49</sup> As a result, Cyril's catechumens through being in Jerusalem had a privilege denied to others, a privilege similar to that bestowed on doubting Thomas: 'others merely hear but we see and touch'; 'it was for our sake that he touched so carefully'.<sup>50</sup> Being in Jerusalem enabled them to come into a closer contact with Christ than was possible elsewhere.

Such an emphasis fitted in well with the wider concerns of the fourth-century Church. Not only was the very truth of the Incarnation being contested in the Arian controversy, resulting in a necessary emphasis upon this doctrine, but part of the way in which the Church was increasing her sway over the formerly pagan majority was to relax from her previously more spiritual and other-worldly focus and to emphasize instead the importance of this physical realm: under such circumstances, the sacraments, 'holy places',

[p.92]

relics, pilgrimage and the like could all be given a new importance. In such a situation the Incarnation inevitably came to the fore as a central doctrine in the Church's life.

Eusebius' spirituality, however, belonged to the former era. Influenced no doubt by the fact that the Church was still at this earlier stage a minority, often persecuted, Christians in the first three centuries after Christ had tended to continue the emphasis found in the New Testament of focusing on the exalted Christ, not the Christ of the Incarnation:

since you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God' (Col. 3:12).<sup>51</sup>

This would then explain not only the comparative lack of spiritual interest in the actual Gospel sites of the Incarnation (noted above), but also the general emphasis on the 'heavenly Jerusalem' rather than on the earthly one:

the present Jerusalem... is in slavery with her children, but the Jerusalem above is free, and she is our mother (Gal. 4:26-7); you have not come to what may be touched... but you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12:22).

Such emphases, which focus on the spiritual world rather than the physical world, are to be found throughout Eusebius' writings.<sup>52</sup> As a result he would naturally come to quite different conclusions from Cyril, who emphasized instead the Incarnation and its sacramental consequences.

In our own day our spirituality will also affect our understanding of Jerusalem. Some will see Christianity as a religion which essentially transcends the physical realm and therefore will find little

---

<sup>49</sup> *Catech.* 14, 23, 16.4, 17.13, 17.22.

<sup>50</sup> *Catech.* 13.22.

<sup>51</sup> Origen, to whom Eusebius was greatly indebted, is perhaps the clearest example of this overriding 'spiritual' emphasis in the Early Church: see e.g. R.P.C. Hanson, *Allegory and Event: a Study of the Sources and Significance of Origen's Interpretation of Scripture* (London, 1959); T.D. Barnes, *op. cit.*, ch. 6.

<sup>52</sup> E.g. *DE.* 4:12.4; 10:8.64; *Comm. in Psa.* [87.11-13], 1064b; *Mart. Pal.* 11.9, 19.

Peter Walker, "Jerusalem in the Early Christian Centuries" P.W.L.Walker, ed., *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*. Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1992. Pbk. ISBN: 0951835610. pp.79-97.

room in their thinking for the city of Jerusalem. The spirituality of others will incline them to accept that a physical entity such as Jerusalem can still have a significant role in God's purposes, but on the basis of which theological principles? Some today would use the Incarnation

[p.93]

and the sacramental principle in a manner similar to Cyril's; others, however, would appeal to the Hebraic emphasis on the physical city of Jerusalem found in the Old Testament scriptures. Jerusalem is thus not simply a place of spirituality, a place where religious faith is practiced; it is also has a place in spirituality, acting as a touch-stone of all that a Christian holds dear.

### 3) Christian definition over against Judaism

A third factor which affected Eusebius and Cyril, and which inevitably affects us today, is the whole question of the relation between Christianity and Judaism. This has never been an easy one for Christians to resolve, caught between the desire on the one hand to distinguish themselves quite strongly from Judaism in their central beliefs about Jesus of Nazareth, and yet on the other to acknowledge their enormous debt to Judaism as their 'parent religion'. Different Christian approaches to Jerusalem emerge as people come to different conclusions about how this balance of distinction and continuity is to be maintained.

For Eusebius the issues were reasonably clear-cut. For him it was axiomatic that spiritual interest in the physical Jerusalem was a characteristic feature of Judaism. Eusebius often labelled literal interpretations of scripture as 'physical and Jewish';<sup>53</sup> his Old Testament commentaries were full of references to the 'true Sion' and the 'true Jerusalem', implying a contrast with the Sion and Jerusalem favoured, he supposed, by Jewish interpreters.<sup>54</sup> On one occasion he stated strongly that

to think of the metropolis of the Jews in Palestine as the city of God is not only base, but even impious, the mark of exceedingly base and petty thinking'.<sup>55</sup>

In contrast to this Christians were to show their distinct identity by eschewing such material and 'earthly' concerns and focusing instead on the 'heavenly Jerusalem'.

This is one of the predominant themes in all his exegesis of the Psalms and of Isaiah, as he seeks to show how the physical entities referred to in these books have now been

[p.94]

outmoded and fulfilled in the Christian understanding of the heavenly Jerusalem and the spiritual Sion. This necessity of drawing a sharp distinction between Christianity and Judaism is seen even more clearly in his apologetical work, the *Proof of the Gospel*. In fact, the contrasting attitudes of Judaism and Christianity towards Jerusalem (combined with the whole more 'spiritual' approach

---

<sup>53</sup> See e.g. *Comm. in Isa.* [66.20], 407-8.

<sup>54</sup> See e.g. *Comm. in Isa.* [49.14-16], 313-4; *Comm. in Psa.* [64.2-3], 624c; DE. 4:12.4.4:17.15.

<sup>55</sup> *Comm. in Psa.* [86.3], 1044b-c.

Peter Walker, "Jerusalem in the Early Christian Centuries" P.W.L.Walker, ed., *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*. Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1992. Pbk. ISBN: 0951835610. pp.79-97.

to scripture and to physical reality in Christianity) is for Eusebius one of the key distinctions between the two religions. As such, this apologetical need to define Christianity as a 'spiritual' religion is perhaps the strongest reason why Eusebius plays down the significance of the earthly Jerusalem. For the issue at stake was one of the essential nature of Christian identity: any interest in the physical Jerusalem was more 'Jewish' than Christian.

Cyril, of course, was no less concerned to distinguish Christianity from Judaism. Yet, if he was to introduce into the Christian Church this new notion of Jerusalem's significance, it was going to be harder to make that distinction; for on this point, his thinking clearly had certain affinities with Judaism: Christianity could now be seen as following Judaism in believing that the physical Jerusalem was of present spiritual significance. This would result, as already noted, in Cyril using certain Old Testament passages in a far more literal way than Eusebius.<sup>56</sup>

How then could Cyril preserve the distinction between Christianity and Judaism? First, he claimed that fourth-century Jerusalem was a Christian city which 'now worshipped Christ' in contrast to the first-century city which had 'crucified him'<sup>57</sup> thus all the scriptural texts relating to God's judgement upon the city were applied to the Jewish people of the first century, leaving Jerusalem as such free to be a continuing vehicle of God's blessing. Secondly, he enhanced the notion of Jerusalem's significance by employing the distinctively Christian category of the Incarnation; this was the distinctively Christian reason, unparalleled in Judaism, for perpetuating the notion of Jerusalem as a 'holy city'.<sup>58</sup> The fact that Christ Incarnate had been in Jerusalem (and that Jerusalem had been the scene for his Cross, Resurrection and Ascension) gave

[p.95]

Jerusalem a unique specialness in God's sight and for the Christian Church.

In noting these two different ways in which Christians distinguished themselves from Judaism, it can be observed that Eusebius' approach was marked by straightforward contrast, Cyril's by a more flagrant appropriation; Eusebius left Jerusalem to be the concern of Judaism, Cyril brought it back to be the birthright of Christians - a more confident approach reflecting the greater confidence of the Church in the post-Constantinian period. Again we must ask ourselves in our own day: in what ways are the differences between Christianity and Judaism to manifest themselves? Is the issue of Jerusalem one of these? Do we mark our differences by contrast or by appropriation?

## V. Their Methods

In noting some of the reasons for their different approaches to Jerusalem we have inevitably begun to touch on some of the methods which Eusebius and Cyril used to defend their respective positions: for example, the emphasis in Cyril on the Incarnation, the emphasis in Eusebius on

---

<sup>56</sup> See above n. 26.

<sup>57</sup> *Catech.* 13.7.

<sup>58</sup> See above at nn. 27 and 49.

Peter Walker, "Jerusalem in the Early Christian Centuries" P.W.L.Walker, ed., *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*. Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1992. Pbk. ISBN: 0951835610. pp.79-97.

God's judgement of the city in AD 70. It will be valuable finally to summarise these and other methods, and to ask of them questions relevant for our own enquiry into the continuing spiritual significance of Jerusalem. For these are some of the key questions which need to be asked in any age as Christians seek to formulate their understanding of the theological status of Jerusalem in the present.

#### a) The Incarnation

The Incarnation was central in Cyril's thinking. How relevant is this to the question of Jerusalem's significance? Can this truth be over-emphasized or used in ways which would be contrary to other (equally) scriptural truths? Is scripture a final truth or can other truths supplement it?

#### b) The events of AD 70

Eusebius had reflected quite deeply on the Fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, but how are Christians to interpret this? Through the destruction of the Temple, these calamitous events confirmed the more spiritual emphases of the New Covenant in Christ (as outlined, for example, in Hebrews), but Christians such as

[p.96]

Eusebius, influenced by the prophetic teaching of Jesus, have gone further and seen it also as an act of divine judgement. Is this legitimate, and if so, what was being judged? - the Jews of that day? Judaism as a religious system? or, Jerusalem as a religious symbol? Most importantly of all, if the Fall of Jerusalem is to be seen as a divine judgement, was it a final and definitive judgement (a complete 'rejection' marking the 'end of an era' in God's purposes) or was it but a temporary judgement, similar perhaps to that experienced in 587 BC after which God's people were encouraged to return?<sup>59</sup>

#### c) The Temple in Jerusalem

Eusebius began to suggest that perhaps the whole notion of Jerusalem's 'holiness' was a false inference made in Old Testament times because of the location of the Temple in its midst: this was indeed the place where 'God's name dwelt', this was truly 'holy', but was that really true of the city as well?<sup>60</sup> If this distinction between city and Temple needs to be borne in mind, how does it affect our interpretation of AD 70? Cyril believed that the Fall of Jerusalem was a judgement simply on the Jewish Temple, thus allowing the city as such to be deemed free of judgement. Was he correct? In the imagery of Ezekiel, when the *shekinah* glory departed from the Temple, did it not depart from the city as well?

#### d) The Cross in Jerusalem

What affect does the fact that Jesus was crucified just outside Jerusalem have on the theological status of the city? Cyril saw the Cross as being to the greater glory of Jerusalem, but others might with equal right see it more truly as the moment of Jerusalem's most profound judgement. In what ways can the city of the crucifixion ever be 'holy'?

---

<sup>59</sup> On interpreting AD 70, see further above ch. 2, p. 74.

<sup>60</sup> See above n. 9.

Peter Walker, "Jerusalem in the Early Christian Centuries" P.W.L.Walker, ed., *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*. Cambridge: Tyndale House, 1992. Pbk. ISBN: 0951835610. pp.79-97.

e) The inter-relation of the Old and New Testaments

Eusebius allowed the negative thrust in the New Testament to be the definitive prism through which he assessed the whole of scripture. Cyril approached the biblical text more uniformly. What is the appropriate hermeneutic? How is the Old Testament to be read in the light of the New?

[p.97]

## VI. Some final questions

In addition to the questions already raised, through comparing both the reasons and methods of Eusebius and Cyril with our own, there are finally some more general questions to be asked.

In assessing the theological status of Jerusalem, Eusebius and Cyril manifest the two opposite extremes which are possible within Christianity. How do we cope with two such extremes within the one faith? Are they reconcilable? Which is more authentically Christian, more truly 'biblical'? In the light of such apparently irreconcilable views, can there ever be such a thing as a 'Christian' approach to Jerusalem?

If some are inclined to espouse Eusebius' more negative approach, are they really saying that Jerusalem can be given no positive function at all? Or might they be able to say with some legitimacy that some positive roles can be found for the city, but only when this negative foundation has been adequately laid?

If some are inclined to espouse Cyril's more positive approach (even if for very different reasons), are they committing the Church to a theology which may (as Cyril's did in due course in the Crusades) have unforeseen and undesirable consequences in the future? Can a positive Christian approach to Jerusalem ever be formulated in such a way that it serves to decrease, rather than to increase, the territorial tensions which already exist over the city because of the city's 'holiness' to both Jews and Muslims?

In other words, given that the situation of our own day is vastly more complicated than it was in the period of Eusebius and Cyril (partly as a result, in fact, of Cyril's theology), how are Christians to show their natural concern for the city in a way which is truly Christian?

---

© 1992 P.W.L. Walker. Reproduced by permission of the author.

Prepared for the web in July 2005 by Robert I Bradshaw

<http://www.theologicalstudies.org.uk/>

---