



Chapter 15

***THE NEW
MOUNT ZION
FOR
CHRISTIANS***

The historical records show that the only Christian area of significance in Jerusalem before the time of Constantine was the Mount of Olives, and specifically to the *cave* that must surely represent the ruined tomb of Jesus. But suddenly, with the advent of Constantine and his mother Helena, churches began to be built (and rebuilt) in Jerusalem after A.D.325. From then on, the most important areas for Christian attention became the former site of the Temple of Venus in the western part of Jerusalem and also the low hill that was located to the south of the Venus Shrine. Granted, Constantine had a church erected over the cave on the Mount of Olives, but the other two western regions took on a more significant role than the Mount of Olives. In fact, the area of the Venus Shrine became known as the “New Jerusalem” and the hill to the south (the large southwest hill of Jerusalem) began to be called “Mount Zion.”

This transfer of attention from the *eastern* region abutting to Jerusalem over to the *western* section of the city was accomplished primarily through the belief in (and the application of) visions,

dreams and miracles. The “signs and wonders” were instrumental in establishing the supposed western site of *Golgotha* as being at the Shrine of Venus. It was also determined at the same time that the southwest hill was the place where Jesus held his Last Supper with his disciples as well as the area where (on Pentecost day after Jesus’ resurrection) the Holy Spirit descended upon the first Christians (Acts 2). Because of this, it became common after the time of Constantine to call the southwest hill “Mount Zion” (usually spelled in Christian circles “Mount Sion”).

But before A.D.325 a very different attitude prevailed among Christians at Jerusalem. In no way was the region of the Venus Shrine called “New Jerusalem” nor was the southwest hill reckoned as “Mount Sion.” It may come as a surprise to many people but the “Mount Sion” for Christians prior to the time of Constantine was none other than *the Mount of Olives*! We have absolute evidence that this was the case from no less than Eusebius (the first Christian historian and an eyewitness to what was happening in Palestine in the early fourth century). At this early time, Eusebius was consistent in stating that Christians acknowledged the Mount of Olives as *the new* Mount Sion. This did not mean that the original “Mount Sion” of the Bible was lost sight of. There was never any doubt where the *real* Mount Sion was. It was on the southeast hill of Jerusalem and by figurative extension it reached north to include the Temple mount.

The Early Written Works of Eusebius

These historical facts are found in one of Eusebius’ early works (written several years before A.D.325). It is called the *Demonstratio Evangelica* (or in English, *Proof of the Gospel*). In this work, Eusebius records that after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70, the “spiritual” headquarters of the *Ekklesia* of God [the the word *Ekklesia* is usually translated “Church”] came to be established on the Mount of Olives. A church building was constructed on this mount and it was called the “Mother Church” (the founda-

tional *Ekklesia*) for all Christendom. The information concerning these matters comes directly from Eusebius in this pre-Constantine work. It is surprising that scholars over the centuries (as far as I am able to determine) have *not* referred to these important early opinions of Eusebius.

In simple terms, Eusebius in this early work shows that a building of the *Ekklesia* existed on the Christian Mount Sion (the Mount of Olives) and that it had been there from shortly after A.D.70. This building was founded to take the place of the old Jerusalem and it became the *new* and *spiritual* Mount Sion for Christians. He called it no less than the “House of God” for Christians (using the phrase that Jews called the Temple). This building on Olivet was the “Mother Church [*Ekklesia*]” for those of the Christian faith.

Let us now look at the information that Eusebius provides in his early work called the *Proof of the Gospel*. The first thing that we should note is the fact that Eusebius was well aware of the actual site of the original Mount Sion. His primary identification was the Temple mount. Notice how Eusebius shows this.

“The hill called Sion and Jerusalem, the buildings there, that is to say, the Temple, the Holy of Holies, the Altar, and whatever else was there dedicated to the glory of God, has been utterly removed or shaken in fulfillment of the Word.... Therefore for your sake the land of Sion shall be ploughed, and Jerusalem shall be a quarry of stones, for being inhabited by men of foreign race it is even now like a quarry, all the inhabitants of the city choosing stones from its ruins as they will, for private as well as public buildings. And it is sad for the eyes to see stones from the Temple itself, and from the sanctuary and holy place, used for building of idol temples, and of theatres for the populace. These things that are open for the eyes to see” (VIII.3).

“Their once famous Mount Sion...is a Roman farm like the rest of the country, yea, with my own eyes I have seen the bulls ploughing there, and the sacred site sown with seed. And Jerusalem itself is become but a storehouse of its fruit of old days now destroyed, or better, as the Hebrew has it, a stonequarry” (ibid.).

“*Mount Sion* was burned and left utterly desolate, and the *Mount of the House of God* became as a grove of wood. If our own observation has any value, we have seen in our own time *Sion* once so famous ploughed with yokes of oxen by the Romans and utterly devastated, and Jerusalem, as the oracle says, deserted like a lodge” (VI.13).

There can be no doubt that at this pre-Constantine period, Eusebius essentially reckoned the original *Sion* to be the Temple mount. And the Temple with the old city area of Jerusalem on the south (the early City of David) were then in ruins. Pagans for the most part were occupying Jerusalem when Eusebius saw these activities going on. They were building idol temples in which to worship false gods and for entertainment the general populace were resorting to the theatres. To Eusebius, with the Temple in ruins and the people in the city of Jerusalem performing their sacrilegious deeds, such things were not pleasant to behold. It is no wonder that the Christian pilgrims who came to Jerusalem retreated to the Mount of Olives *east* of Jerusalem for their worship services and left the city to the “theatre-goers.”

Be this as it may, the point I wish to make in my present context is that Eusebius knew full well that the actual *Sion* was primarily the Temple mount. At no time in this early work did he even remotely suggest that the *southwest* hill was the *real* *Sion* or that it was even the *spiritual* *Sion* of Christians.

A hundred years before Eusebius, the great scholar Origen went to Jerusalem and viewed the region. In his writings he always identified “*Sion*” with the Temple mount and *not* the *southwest* hill (*In John* iv.19,20; and see *ISBE* (1929), Vol.V, p.3151). Even about a hundred years after the time of Eusebius, we find Jerome pointing out the City of David as real *Sion* and that it extended to the Temple mount (*In Isaiah*, i.21; ii,3; xxii.1,2; xxxvi; xli.25; *In Zech.* ix.9,10; xiii. 1,2; xiv.5). Jerome also made the correct identification in his New Testament commentary (*Matthew* x.28). But from the time of Constantine onward, it became common to transfer *Sion* from its

actual location in the eastern side of the city to the *southwest* hill, and in Jerome's translation of Eusebius' *Onomasticon* (one of the latest works of Eusebius, and added to and "brought up to date" by Jerome), Jerome apparently allows for the *new* interpretation to satisfy the beliefs of people about a hundred years after Eusebius (*Palestine Pilgrim Text*, Vol.I, pp.60-62). This only occurred, however, when the Venus Shrine became the *New Jerusalem* after A.D.325. From then on, it became quite acceptable for Christians to call the southwest hill "Sion." The Bordeaux Pilgrim even made the association.

This was not the case before the time of Constantine's ascendancy over the Empire in A.D.324. In the period before A.D.324, Eusebius was consistent in referring to the Mount of Olives as the Christian "Mount Sion." This is because the original "Church [*Ekklesia*] of God," as Eusebius stated it, had been established after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70 near the *cave* on Olivet.

"The Mount of Olives is therefore literally opposite to Jerusalem and to the east of it, but also THE HOLY CHURCH OF GOD, and the mount UPON WHICH IT WAS FOUNDED, of which the Saviour teaches: A city set on a hill cannot be hid, RAISED UP IN PLACE OF JERUSALEM that is fallen never to rise again, and thought worthy of the feet of the Lord, is figuratively not only opposite Jerusalem, but east of it as well, receiving the rays of the divine light, and become much before Jerusalem [in prominence], and near the Sun of Righteousness himself" (ibid., VI.18 emphases mine).

This account of Eusebius shows that the Holy Church [*Ekklesia*] of God "was founded on the Mount of Olives." This is a statement of great importance to the modern historian of the New Testament because this is the opinion of Eusebius himself, the first ecclesiastical historian of the Christian faith and one who was a native of Palestine and the curator of the large library at Caesarea. He said that "the Holy Church of God" of Christendom came into being *on the Mount of Olives!* Note that he did not say that the Church of the

Holy Sepulchre built by Constantine was the *foundation* Church (as one would expect if that area was truly where Jesus was crucified and resurrected from the dead). No, to Eusebius the Holy Church of God “*was founded on the Mount of Olives.*” Most significantly, Eusebius made this remarkable historical observation several years *before* Constantine and his mother Helena came on the scene to insist by visions, dreams and supposed miracles that Christendom was really founded in the direct opposite direction from Olivet.

The Holy Church of God on the Mount of Olives

Eusebius, however, doesn’t stop with this revealing bit of information. He went on to say that the “Holy Church of God” on the Mount of Olives was “raised up instead of Jerusalem.” It was a type of headquarters church with its associated buildings. It even became, in the eyes of later Christians, the city on the hill that Jesus spoke about. This city on Olivet was to Eusebius a new city — a new mount, and one that was to be exalted before the Jerusalem of old. Indeed, Eusebius in the plainest of words (in this pre-Constantine work) said that the Mount of Olives was the place where a new “House of God” [a synonym for a new Temple or Sanctuary of God] was built after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70. Eusebius said the Scriptures “tell of a new Mount, and the righteousness of ANOTHER HOUSE OF GOD, besides the one in Jerusalem” (*ibid.*, II.3).

What was established on the Mount of Olives was a type of new city (that was later compared to the city set on a hill that Jesus spoke about) which was raised up instead of the old Jerusalem. Eusebius is consistent with this theme.

“And *this Mount of Olives* is said to be over against Jerusalem, because it was established by God *after the fall of Jerusalem, INSTEAD OF THE OLD EARTHLY JERUSALEM*” (*ibid.*, VI.18).

After A.D.70, the Mount of Olives became the new site of the

“House of God” *instead* of the Temple that was located on old Mount Zion. To Eusebius, that Christian headquarters church with its attendant buildings became so prominent on the Mount of Olives that this Mother Church became geographically indistinguishable from the Mount of Olives itself. Eusebius himself makes this parallel identification.

“His Church which is metaphorically called *the Mount of Olives*” (*ibid.*).

“And *this* mount of the Lord was *the Mount of Olives*, which is called Asael in the Septuagint. And this word in Hebrew is ‘Work of God’...[it represents] *the Christian Church and the work of God*” (*ibid.*).

“*The Mount of Olives* is therefore literally opposite to Jerusalem and to the *east* of it, but [it is] *also the Church of God*, and the mount on which it [the Church of God] is founded” (*ibid.*).

Since Eusebius before the time of Constantine believed that the Church of God was located atop the Mount of Olives, it can be seen why Christians of the time began to call the Mount of Olives the *new* “Mount Zion.”

The Scriptures “tell of *a new mount, and the manifesting of another House of God*, besides the one in Jerusalem” (*ibid.*, II.3).

“The Word announces this to the daughter of Sion, calling the Church of God by that name” (*ibid.*, VI.17).

“The Church of God might be called the daughter of Sion” (*ibid.*).

This is certainly the reason why the Mount of Olives prior to Constantine was the only site in all Jerusalem where pilgrims from around the world came to worship. The principal area of interest, so Eusebius tells us, was the *cave/tomb* near the southern summit of Olivet.

“And this Mount of Olives is said to be over against Jerusalem, instead of the old earthly Jerusalem and its worship...believers in Christ congregate from all parts of the world...that they may worship at the Mount of Olives opposite the city...TO THE CAVE that

is shown there” (*ibid.*, VI.18, all emphases are mine).

Note again (and this point bears emphasizing), Eusebius said *nothing* at this pre-Constantine date about Christian pilgrims from around the world coming to Jerusalem to worship at or near the Temple of Venus (which after A.D.325 became the *new* “Golgotha”) or even that they paid any attention whatever to locations on the southwest hill. The only area of interest to pre-Constantinian pilgrims, as far as this early evidence of Eusebius is concerned, was the *cave* on the Mount of Olives. And in this period the Mount of Olives was also being called the Christian “Mount Sion.” Even the Jewish authorities were calling it “the Mount of the Anointing (the Christ).” This fact is made even clearer by Eusebius when he referred to the law going forth from Mount Sion in Isaiah 2:2-4. He gave the Christian interpretation of that prophecy in Book I, Chapter 4. He showed that the new Mount Sion was Olivet!

“This law going forth from Sion, different from the law enacted in the desert by Moses on Mount Sinai, what can it be but the word of the Gospel, *going forth from Sion* through our Saviour Jesus Christ, and going through all nations? For it is plain, that it was in Jerusalem *AND MOUNT SION ADJACENT THERETO* (*where our Lord and Saviour for the most part lived and taught*) that the law of the new covenant began *and from THENCE* went forth and shone upon all, according to the commands which he gave his disciples when he said: ‘Go ye, and make disciples of all nations, teaching them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you’.”

Though the command of Jesus that Eusebius quotes was given in Galilee (Matthew 28:16-20), no one ever thought that the Mount Sion of the New Covenant was located that far north. This *new* Mount Sion of Eusebius was near Jerusalem. Indeed, he made the plain statement (shown in the above quote) that this *new* Mount Sion was “ADJACENT” to the city of Jerusalem. That’s right. It was a mount that was *adjacent* to the city of Jerusalem, but it was not a part of the actual city. This is precisely the description that Eusebius used to describe the geographical position of the Mount

of Olives. He said it was “over against” Jerusalem (*ibid.*, VI.18), and in another section Eusebius said: “the Mount of Olives is therefore *literally opposite* Jerusalem and to the east of it” (*ibid.*, VI.18). These descriptions of Eusebius fit perfectly with his statement that the *new* Mount Zion for Christians was also “*adjacent*” to Jerusalem.

Strangely, there have been some scholars who have read this description of this *new* Mount Zion being *adjacent* to Jerusalem and have assumed it meant the southwestern mount that became the so-called Christian Sion when the Temple of Venus was selected to be “Golgotha.” The fact is, however, the southwest mount had always been within the walls of Jerusalem as they existed in the time of Jesus. This identification will not work, because Eusebius made it clear in the context of his work *Proof of the Gospel* that he was speaking about the Mount of Olives since he made the clear references that Olivet was “over against” Jerusalem, or was “opposite Jerusalem,” or (in identifying it with Mount Zion) it was “adjacent” to Jerusalem. The only candidate possible for the *new* Mount Zion of the Christians before the time of Constantine was the Mount of Olives, and this is the only mountain emphasized by Eusebius in this section of his *Proof of the Gospel*.

The New Mount Zion became the Mount of Olives

There can be no doubt of this identification when we consider the next piece of evidence from Eusebius in reference to the above quote. He said that this *new* Mount Zion was the “MOUNT SION (in which our Lord and Saviour *spent so much time*)” (*ibid.*, VI.13). This statement of Eusebius is one of the most important in helping to identify the *new* Sion with the Mount of Olives. Why is this? It is simple to answer. This is because the New Testament tells us plainly that it was on the Mount of Olives where Jesus lived and taught while in the area of Jerusalem. It was his “habitual” place for meeting with his apostles (Luke 22:39). On Olivet is where he many times met there with his disciples (John 18:2). And by “day

he was teaching in the Temple; but at night he went out, and abode in the mount that is called the Mount of Olives” (Luke 21:37). Even the village of Bethany where he sometimes resided was on the eastern slopes of the Mount of Olives (Mark 11:1).

There is not the slightest evidence in the New Testament, however, that the southwest hill located within the city of Jerusalem in Jesus’ time was where Jesus met many times with his disciples. The home of Jesus in the Jerusalem area was clearly on the Mount of Olives. Eusebius called it: “Mount Sion *adjacent thereto* [to Jerusalem] where our Lord and Saviour for the most part lived and taught” (*ibid.*, I.4). And, of course, the Mount of Olives was directly *adjacent* to Jerusalem, or as Eusebius said twice in another section of the *Proof of the Gospel*: “this Mount of Olives is *over against* Jerusalem” and also “the Mount of Olives *opposite* the city” (*ibid.*, VI.18).

And remember. It was on this Mount of Olives that the “Mother Church” of all Christendom was built after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D.70 and Eusebius said the Scriptures called it “a *new* mount, and the manifesting of *another House of God*, besides the one in Jerusalem” (*ibid.*, II.3). Quoting Isaiah 2:1-4 Eusebius said that from this *new* mount, the Law of God would go forth (*ibid.*, I.4). He said: “This law going forth from Sion, different from the Law enacted in the desert by Moses at Mount Sinai” would be the “Gospel *going forth from Sion* through our Savior Jesus Christ” (*ibid.*, VI.18). Eusebius was teaching that the Gospel itself would go forth from the top of this *new* Mount Sion which he identified with the Mount of Olives. This *new* Law was to be sent to the world from a *new* “House of God.” What did he mean by his reference to this “House of God” atop the Mount of Olives? Other writings of Eusebius show that he meant a church building as well as an administrative center. In his *Oration* he said *churches* are called “the Houses of the Lord” (XVII.4). This was the common designation which began to be used for church buildings in the early fourth cen-

ture (see *Eccl.Hist.*, IX,10). And after the fall of Jerusalem in A.D.70, Eusebius stated that the *new* “House of God” became located on the Mount of Olives. Indeed, he made a direct statement to this effect. “The Mount of Olives is therefore literally opposite to Jerusalem and to the *east* of it, but also *the Holy Church of God*” (*ibid.*, I.4). Eusebius could not make the identification any plainer.

The New Covenant and the Mount of Olives

There is even more information about the Mount of Olives. Eusebius stated that on this very mountain (called the *new* Mount Zion), the New Covenant had its beginning. He said: “The law of the New Covenant began [on the Mount of Olives], and *from THENCE* [the Mount of Olives] went forth and shone upon all” (*ibid.*, I.4). The New Testament makes it clear that it was the shedding of the blood of Jesus that brought into existence the New Covenant as interpreted by the apostles (Hebrews 9:12-15). With Eusebius stating that the New Covenant began on the *new* Mount Zion which he identified with Olivet, then we have his plain teaching that the death of Jesus took place on that mountain *adjacent* to Jerusalem. As a matter of fact, Eusebius makes the clear statements in his *Commentary of Isaiah* in reference to Isaiah 2:1-4 that it was on Mount Zion where Jesus met his death and from which he was resurrected from the dead. Dr. Peter Walker in his book “Holy City, Holy Places?” shows this belief of Eusebius. He translates Eusebius’ words in his *Commentary* thusly: “Earthly Zion *in which occurred* the Saviour’s death and resurrection” (p.305, Oxford Univ.Press, 1990, italics mine). This “Mount Zion” of Eusebius is without doubt the Mount of Olives. It is no wonder that Eusebius thought that the New Covenant itself began with the sprinkling of Jesus’ blood on the *new* Mount Zion because that is precisely where he believed Jesus was crucified and resurrected from the dead. Once this is understood, a flood of light comes on the scene in recognizing the significance of the “Mother Church” of Christendom being built as a *new* “House of God” on the Mount of Olives where

the greatest event in history took place.

More Christian Significance

The Mount of Olives must have been the most important area in pre-Constantine Jerusalem for other reasons. Even the bishops of Jerusalem were buried near the *cave/tomb* on the Mount of Olives and it was significant enough in the early history of Christianity that Constantine had a church built over this site (the Eleona Church) shortly after A.D.325. And sometime in the second century, a tomb chamber was carved out of the rock adjacent to the *cave* itself (with spaces for five bodies). It appears from this that some people felt inspired to be buried near the *cave/tomb*. Dr. Wilkinson states: "It is hardly likely that this particular chamber was used for burying the bishops of Jerusalem, since it is a crude affair, which obviously existed before Constantine's church. We are told, however, that their tombs [those of the bishops] were at the church, and therefore they cannot have been far away" (*The Jerusalem Jesus Knew*, p.122).

Since bishops were ordinarily buried in the most important church grounds (or cemetery), it is remarkable that the early bishops of Jerusalem chose their burial spots very near the *cave/tomb* on Olivet. The reason for this should be clear. If one believes Eusebius' statements that the "Mother Church" of all Christendom was built in this very region shortly after A.D.70, then it can be easily seen why ecclesiastical authorities of the Christian church in Jerusalem would want to be buried near that "Mother Church."

The Shekinah Glory Retreated to the Mount of Olives

There is also another reason why Christians in the first century were very interested in the Mount of Olives. This is because it was believed that the Shekinah Glory of God (the Spirit or Presence of God) which supposedly dwelt inside the Holy of Holies at the Temple *left the sanctuary* and went to the Mount of Olives and hovered over that spot at the time of the Roman/Jewish War which

ended in A.D.70. The fact that the Shekinah Glory left the old Temple and migrated to the top of the Mount of Olives was an important event to Eusebius. Notice some aggregate quotes from Eusebius which come from Book VI. Chapter 18 (288) of his *Proof of the Gospel* which show its significance.

“Believers in Christ congregate from all parts of the world, not as of old time because of the glory of Jerusalem, nor that they may worship in the ancient Temple at Jerusalem, but...that they may worship at the Mount of Olives opposite to the city, *whither the glory [the Shekinah Glory] of the Lord migrated when it left the former city.*”

Eusebius gave a prophecy that the Shekinah Glory was to leave the Temple and old Jerusalem not long before they were to be destroyed. He said the Shekinah Glory of God would —

“depart from it [from Jerusalem] to the mount opposite the city called the Mount of Olives. And this, too, the prophet Ezekiel anticipates by the Holy Spirit and foretells. For he says: ‘And the Cherubim lifted their wings, and wheels beside them, and *the glory of the God of Israel* was on them [and] above them, and *he stood on the mount which was opposite to the city*’.”

This prophecy of Ezekiel was believed by Eusebius to have been fulfilled just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. This is why the Jewish Christians just after A.D.70 built their “Mother Church” at this site on the Mount of Olives. Even Jerome, almost a hundred years after Eusebius, acknowledged that the Cherubim carried the Shekinah Glory near the summit of Olivet and founded the church of Christ.

“Here also [the Mount of Olives] according to Ezekiel the Cherubim after leaving the Temple *FOUNDED the Church of the Lord*” (*Letter CVIII.12*).

This shows that Jerome also followed Eusebius in showing that the Cherubim “*founded* the Church of the Lord” near the summit of Olivet. Indeed, Jerome goes further. He states that when the Antichrist comes to the Jerusalem area to establish his headquarters

on top of what the Bible calls “the glorious holy mountain,” Jerome says that this mountain is the Mount of Olives (See *Jerome’s Commentary on Daniel*, 11:45, note Archer’s trans., Baker Book House, 1958). So, the “Mother Church” of all Christendom was not founded on the old Mount Zion of the Temple Mount, nor was it founded on the southwest hill of Jerusalem, neither was it founded at what later became known as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Even Jerome recognized that “the glorious holy mountain” in Jerusalem had actually become *the Mount of Olives*. This was an official change for the “House of God” in the eyes of Jerome because the Shekinah Glory had retreated from the Temple Mount and it went to the top of the Mount of Olives and, as Jerome said, “founded the Church of the Lord.” But when did the Shekinah Glory leave the Temple and hover over the Mount of Olives? Eusebius states that it was during “the siege of Jerusalem” (A.D.66 to 70) that “*the passing of the Lord to the Mount of Olives*” took place (*Proof of the Gospel*, XVIII sect.294).

Jewish Authorities Believed the Same Thing

Eusebius and Jerome, however, were not the only observers who said the Shekinah Glory left the Temple before the destruction of the Temple and hovered over the Mount of Olives. A Jewish rabbi named Jonathan (an eyewitness to the destruction of Jerusalem) said the Shekinah Glory left the Temple and (for three and a half years) —

“abode on the Mount of Olives hoping that Israel would repent, but they did not; while a *Bet Kol* [a supernatural voice from heaven] issued forth announcing, *Return, O backsliding children* [Jeremiah 3:14]. *Return unto me, and I will return unto you* [Malachi 3:7]. When they did not repent, it said, *I will return to my place* [in heaven] [Hosea 5:15]” (Midrash, *Rabbah Lamentations* 2:11).

Josephus and the Removal of the Shekinah Glory

Besides these evidences, there was another writer (besides

Eusebius, Jerome and Jonathan) who mentioned the Shekinah Glory of God leaving the Temple at Jerusalem just prior to the war with the Romans. This was the Jewish historian, Josephus. Josephus said that in the Spring of A.D.66 some remarkable events took place that involved the Temple at Jerusalem. In fact, Josephus gave three miracles associated with the Shekinah Glory and the Temple and each one showed that the “Glory” was *departing* the Holy Sanctuary. In *War VI.290* he stated that a great light shone over the altar for thirty minutes at 3 o’clock in the morning (a week before Passover in A.D.66) and then it *departed*. He said the sacred scribes interpreted this sign as a bad omen for the Temple. It was like the Shekinah Glory moving away from the Tabernacle in the wilderness as a sign to disassemble the Tabernacle and transport it to another location. This may have been fine for the Tabernacle (which was portable), but it was impossible to move the Temple which was made of stone and timber. Then, a few days later (during Passover itself) the enormous brass gates of Nicanor, requiring twenty men to open and close them, opened at midnight of their own accord (*War VI.293-295*). This was also interpreted as showing a desolation coming upon the Temple. And then, about fifty days later, on Pentecost, the final sign was given which definitely showed that the Shekinah Glory was *departing* the Temple as the other signs indicated.

“Moreover, at the festival which is called Pentecost, the priests on entering the inner court of the Temple at nightfall, as their custom was in accomplishment of their ministrations, stated that they first became aware of a commotion and a roar, and after that the voice of a great multitude saying ‘*We are departing hence*’” (*War VI.299*).

This is the testimony of Josephus (who was an eyewitness to these times) that the Shekinah Glory left the old Temple on that Pentecost day in A.D.66. When we couple this information with that of Rabbi Jonathan (also an eyewitness), we find that the “Glory” went directly to the Mount of Olives and in some manner

that the Jewish people were aware remained over the top of Olivet for 3 and 1/2 years (this would mean from late Spring in A.D.66 to about December of A.D.69, nearly eight months before the Temple was destroyed) and then it went back to heaven according to Rabbi Jonathan, and it has not returned since.

This was highly significant to Christians. It certainly was to Eusebius in his early work *The Proof of the Gospel* and to Jerome. This meant that the Shekinah Glory which made the Temple holy in the first place retreated from the Temple and positioned itself directly over the very region where Jesus died for mankind and where he was resurrected from the dead. From that region it apparently manifested itself as a divine apparition from time to time (as it once did when it was associated with the Temple) and, according to Rabbi Jonathan, it gave its warnings to repent to the people of Jerusalem over a period of 3 and 1/2 years.

Now if people wish to believe that all of this was a figment of imagination for Rabbi Jonathan, then they can dismiss the matter (or criticize away his statement) but this is what the Jewish Rabbi stated and I have no reason to doubt that the Shekinah Glory could have done that very thing Jonathan said. At least, Eusebius and Jerome himself believed the “Glory” retreated to the Mount of Olives just prior to the destruction of the Temple.

The Shekinah Glory Points Out the Mount of Olives

This means that the Shekinah Glory went, after leaving the Temple, to the very region where Jesus died and was resurrected from the dead. This was also the place from which Jesus prophesied the ruin of Jerusalem (Matthew 24). And this was the spot where Eusebius said the Christian “House of God” was *founded* (and Jerome believed the same thing) just after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70. Indeed, Eusebius connected the final sign given to the twenty-four priests at Pentecost in A.D.66 with an oracle given to Christians at this same period which warned them to

abandon Jerusalem in accordance with Jesus' prophecies.

“The whole body of the church at Jerusalem having been commanded by a divine revelation, given to men of approved piety before the war [the 24 priests who entered the Temple on Pentecost], removed from the city and dwelt in a certain town beyond Jordan called Pella” (*Eccl.Hist.*, III.5; cf. Epiphanius, *Haeres. Nazaraeorum*, 7).

That does not end the story. Not long after the war was over in A.D.70, Eusebius reports that Christians returned to the region of Jerusalem and that fifteen Jewish bishops ruled in the city for the next 62 years (*Eccl.Hist.*, IV.5). Once the Jewish Christians returned to the Jerusalem area from Pella, they installed their first bishop to head the Jerusalem church. They selected Simeon, the brother of James and one of the children of Joseph and Mary (Simeon was a “half-brother” of Jesus by physical descent). These Jewish Christians, according to Eusebius, established their church headquarters on the Mount of Olives. Notice his *Proof of the Gospel*.

“And *this Mount of Olives* is said to be over against Jerusalem, because it was established by God *after the fall of Jerusalem, instead of the old earthly Jerusalem*” (VI.18).

“*The Mount of Olives* is therefore literally opposite to Jerusalem and to the east of it, *but also* [is located] *the Holy Church of God, and the mount on which it is founded*, of which the Saviour teaches: ‘A city set on a hill cannot be hid, *raised up in place of Jerusalem* that is fallen never to rise again’” (VI.18).

These references of Eusebius show that the Jewish Christians after their return from Pella *did not* select a site as their headquarters on the southwest hill. They also avoided the area where the Temple of Venus was built after the time the emperor Hadrian constructed the city of Aelia on the site of Jerusalem after A.D.135. And within that 62 year period (from A.D.70 to A.D.132) it would have been perfectly allowable, one would think, to erect a church or to recognize as a “holy place” the spot where the Temple of Venus was later built after A.D.135. But, according to Eusebius,

those Jewish Christians were not persuaded to do anything of the kind. Those Christians, right after A.D.70, homed in on only one area in the environs of Jerusalem as being geographically important to them. This was where the “*OUTWARD Sanctuary*” for sacrificing the Red Heifer and other sin offerings was located in the time of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 44:1). Also, it was on the Mount of Olives where Jesus was crucified and resurrected from the dead and the area the Shekinah Glory selected as the place of “holiness” just before Jerusalem was destroyed.

The Mount of Olives became Significant to Christians

There were also other reasons why these Jewish Christians picked the Mount of Olives for their headquarters. When the Jewish Christians returned to the area of Jerusalem after A.D.70, they were able to observe that most of the city on the western hills which comprised the Temple region, as well as the old aristocratic area on the southwest hill and all the western areas that once represented the old city of Jerusalem were now in utter devastation. So thorough was the ruin of Jerusalem that a visitor to the area would never have believed that a city once graced the former metropolitan precincts. Josephus gave an eyewitness account of the devastation. He said: “Now as soon as the army had no more people to slay or plunder, Caesar gave orders that they should now demolish *the entire city and temple* [except a few towers and parts of some walls] but for the rest of the wall encircling the city, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those who dug it up to the foundation that there was nothing left to make people who came later to the area to believe that the region had ever been inhabited” (*War*, VII.1-3).

The city of Jerusalem was completely demolished. On the western and southwestern hill the camp of the Tenth Legion of the Roman army was established. As Prof. Mazar describes it, Jerusalem was “hardly more than a military base for the Roman garrison” (*The Mountain of the Lord*, p.233). And this was true.

Indeed, no walls were left around the city (and the city remained without walls until the end of the second or the beginning of the third century) (Mazar, *ibid.*, p.237). Without walls to protect the city, no region in the environs of Jerusalem offered any protection to people who wished a normal security. The whole region was an open one. And after A.D.70, the Tenth Legion began to construct brick barracks on most of the southwestern hill. With the Roman military camp in that area, who would want to build a church in that region? Or, even more to the point, what Roman military commander would allow a Christian church to be constructed within (or very near) his encampment? This would have been highly irregular if not impossible. In no way were the western parts of Jerusalem or the southwest hill proper places to construct a new Christian church. The Mount of Olives, however, was an entirely different proposition. That region would have been possible, and in fact, that is exactly where Eusebius said the Jewish Christians when they returned from Pella in A.D.70 built their church, and Jerome said this was the *foundational* church for all Christians. It became the “Mother Church” for Christendom.

Even ordinary Jews (that is, non-Christian Jews) had the same problem in trying to relocate their administrative offices in the desolate areas which once were Jerusalem. Not only were all the regions in abject ruins, but the area of Jerusalem itself had become nothing more than a Roman military camp. With this being the situation, the Jewish authorities decided that they had no alternative but to leave Jerusalem altogether. They finally got permission from the Roman authorities to move their administrative headquarters for Jewish affairs to the town of Jamnia near the Mediterranean coast. And that is what they did. Jerusalem proved to be an improper place for the Jews to conduct any further their religious obligations, and so they abandoned it.

This identical predicament also faced the Jewish Christians who had just returned from Pella in the latter part of A.D.70. What were

they to do? It was impossible to build on the southwest hill because the Tenth Legion was encamped in that area. All the rest of Jerusalem was in desolation. So, what region could serve as a proper place to build their headquarters buildings? The answer was not difficult to come by.

The Book of Hebrews Provides Essential Answers

In the Book of Hebrews (which Christians now reckoned as inspired literature), the answer was made plain. It even recommended that Christians should abandon the old city of Jerusalem and journey outside its gates and outside its camp (Hebrews 13:10-14). To be outside the camp of Jerusalem meant that they had to be at least 2000 cubits (about 3000 feet) away from the former Holy Place in the Temple. And indeed, the author of Hebrews made it clear, from his continual reference to the Tabernacle in the wilderness (at the time of Moses), that *the* gate [that is, the *single* gate] through which Christians should retreat from Jerusalem was the *eastern* gate, because in the Tabernacle there were only gateways opening on its *east* side. To go through *the* gate [that is, the outer gate of the sanctuary] that the author of the Book of Hebrews commanded Christians to do, meant that Christians had to go *eastward* — through the *east* gate. This would have led them away from old Jerusalem and directly up to the summit of the Mount of Olives. And that is exactly where Eusebius said the Jewish Christians built their new “House of God” (and headquarters) right after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D.70. And Jerome confirmed the same thing. There would have been no more logical region.

Thus, Eusebius gave us some very revealing information in his early work *Proof of the Gospel* that the Christian “House of God” (the “Holy Church of God”) was erected at the top of the Mount of Olives (VI.18). This church continued to exist as the center of Palestinian Christendom until the beginning of the fourth century. In fact, that church was still in operation when Eusebius wrote his historical work called *Proof of the Gospel*.

It must be recalled that there were no walls surrounding Jerusalem after A.D.70, and the historical evidence shows that no walls were built to enclose the city until the start of the third century. Speaking of an event in the early third century, Eusebius mentioned that there were then “gates” to the city (*Eccl.Hist*, IX,11). It was no doubt felt unnecessary to construct walls around Aelia (the name for Jerusalem) as long as the Tenth Legion occupied the southwest hill and dominated the former areas of the city. The Tenth Legion remained headquartered in the southwest region of Jerusalem until about A.D.285 when it removed to Eilat on the Red Sea (Mazar, *ibid.*, p.237).

Once the Roman army ceased to occupy the southwestern area, it is possible that a small Christian church was built on the southwest hill and this could have been referred to by Epiphanius in the next century (*Weights and Measures* 14). Though a small church could have been constructed in the region, it is difficult to believe that it could have survived the destruction of churches and other Christian buildings in the Diocletian persecution that began in A.D.303 and lasted for ten years. This is because Eusebius (who was an eyewitness to affairs in Palestine at the time) said that there was a total devastation of all Christian churches in the region (*Eccl.Hist.*, VII.30,32). In no way could Epiphanius’ “small church” have survived this utter desolation of the churches in Palestine. “In the nineteenth year of Diocletian’s reign an imperial decree was published everywhere, ordering the churches to be razed to the ground” (*ibid.*, VIII.2). Or, as Eusebius said: “No longer satisfied with the old buildings, they raised from the foundation in all the cities churches spacious in plan” (*ibid.*, VIII.1). And, “I saw with my own eyes the places of worship thrown down from top to bottom, to the very foundations” (*ibid.*, VIII.2). Such destruction would have included, of course, any church on the southwest hill, but it also included the grandest church of all in Jerusalem, the “Mother Church” which had existed on the Mount of Olives from shortly after A.D.70.

Only the Cave/Tomb was Important to Jerusalem Christians

What must be understood, however, is the fact that before the Diocletian persecution which began in A.D.303 (and the destruction of all the churches in Jerusalem), the only place that Christians worshipped was near the *cave/tomb* on the Mount of Olives. It was there that the building called the “House of God” was built. And this is the area to which the Shekinah Glory hovered for 3 and 1/2 years before Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D.70 to point out where the real region of “holiness” was located around the city of Jerusalem. This is where Jesus was crucified and resurrected from the dead. It is no wonder that the Mount of Olives became known to early Christians as the new Mount Sion.

It is also significant that in the period before A D.303, there is not the slightest mention that the region of the Temple of Venus in the western part of Jerusalem, or the area of the southwest hill, were in any way important. It was only after Constantine came on the scene as the first Christian emperor of the Roman Empire that these western locales began to be looked on as holy places.

It is also important to realize that Eusebius wrote the main part of his *Proof of the Gospel* just before (or during) the year of A.D.303. This was the very year that the Diocletian persecution began. But what does Eusebius describe was the historical environment in his *Proof of the Gospel*? At this early time, pilgrims were able to travel from around the Roman world to visit Jerusalem and Bethlehem [Book VI. 18 (288)]. But Eusebius made it clear that during the ten years of what is called the Diocletian persecution it was not possible to navigate the Mediterranean (*Eccl.Hist.* VIII.15.1). This continued until Constantine secured domination over the eastern half of the Roman Empire. But before A.D.303 (when Eusebius wrote the *Proof of the Gospel*) he was saying that “men still hasten from the ends of the earth” to visit Palestine [*Proof of the Gospel*, I.1 (4)] and that people were then flocking from abroad to come to the Holy Land [*ibid.*, III.2 (97)]. When

Eusebius wrote this work there were then enormous churches found everywhere in the world [*ibid.*, III.7 (138)]. But this prosperous condition that Eusebius was describing in his *Proof of the Gospel* changed in the very year he was writing this book. In spite of the prosperity that was then evident, he began to say that persecution was setting in [*ibid.*, III.5 (119)]. From these historical indications it is pretty easy to date the writing of Eusebius' *Proof of the Gospel* to the year A.D.303. The reason this is important is to show that the Christianity of A.D.303 that Eusebius was writing about in his *Proof of the Gospel* was very different from that which emerged with Constantine a short 25 years later.

In the next chapter I will show just why the attention of Christians was finally directed away from the Mount of Olives on the *east* of Jerusalem, and why they turned westward to the area of the Temple of Venus and the southwest hill. It was not because of any historical evidence described in the teaching of the New Testament that prompted these later Christians to make the change, nor was it because of early records maintained by the Christian authorities at Jerusalem. No, it was none of these things. The reason for their selection of the Temple of Venus in the time of Constantine was because Christians began to pay heed to (and to trust in) many *new* spiritual revelations which began to come to Christian authorities through the medium of dreams, visions and wonders. The following chapter will explain.