

Article

Jerusalem as the Central Place for Paul and Acts

Eyal Regev 

Martin (Szusz) Department of Land of Israel Studies and Archaeology, Bar-Ilan University,
Ramat Gan 590002, Israel; eyal.regev@biu.ac.il

Abstract: In Galatians 1–2, Paul mentions several times that the apostles’ leadership is situated in Jerusalem. In Gal 2:1–2, he even designates it simply as “Jerusalem”. Paul acknowledges the centrality of the apostles in Jerusalem in his enterprise of the collection of the money for the saints in Jerusalem. Yet, the city is transformed into central theological concepts in Paul’s distinction between “the present Jerusalem” and “Jerusalem above” (Gal 4:25–26). Thus, despite his debates with Peter and James, Paul not only accepts that the early Christian leadership dwells in Jerusalem, but he also designates the center of the Jesus movement as “Jerusalem”. This means that the holiness of the city, its prophetic heritage, and messianic hopes as reflected in the Hebrew Bible are associated with the apostles’ community. Quite a similar picture is found in the narrative of the Acts of the Apostles. Jerusalem is mentioned in Acts fifty-nine times. Luke refers to the name of the city time and again, stressing that the apostles act and live in Jerusalem, that Paul comes to the city, and that other events happen there. Yet, the oft-repeated references to Jerusalem in Acts go far beyond accurate geographic descriptions. In Acts, the author stresses that the Jesus movement operates in/from the Jewish holy center, which accords the movement legitimacy as a Jewish movement. Jerusalem is “the place” of the apostles’ community. The community of apostles is identified with the city, as if they are Jerusalem. In a sense, Luke follows Paul (and most probably the apostles’ community) in associating the origin and center of the Jesus movement with Jerusalem. This association may be explored in light of the theory of place (which is related to the general theory of space or spatial theory). The apostles identify with Jerusalem to show other believers in Jesus that they are the leaders and center of the Jesus movement. It is an act of domination. At the same time, they claim to be “Jerusalem” while being persecuted. Hence their self-association with the city is also an act of resistance.

Keywords: Paul; Acts of the Apostles; place theory; historical-geography; NT theology



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1. Introduction

For both Paul and Luke, the author of the third gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, the gospel message is intended to be spread worldwide. All nations are called to believe in Jesus. The Holy Spirit is accessible to the believers, no matter where they are (e.g., [Räsänen 2010](#), pp. 231–46). In both Paul’s letters and the Book of Acts, the physical location of the believer is hardly an issue. The gospel is universal: all are one in Christ (Gal 3:28).

It seems that Paul spiritualizes the notion of Zion when he transfers the earthly Zion into a heavenly Zion or the Church (Rom 11:26–27; Gal 4:26; and [Davies 1974](#), pp. 196–98). [Davies \(1974, pp. 219–20\)](#) concludes that Paul concentrates on “the land of Christians” rather than on the land of his fathers. He transforms his geographical identity, although he never conclusively abandons the geography of eschatology. Some scholars maintain that for Luke, Jesus’s Jerusalem is not the place of the Kingdom and it does not have religious meaning of its own. According to Luke, Jerusalem has only a functional role as the place of the Passion. It is doomed to destruction, and the gospel merely begins there ([Conzelmann 1961](#), pp. 74, 134, and 147).¹ In Luke, some find “a demotion of Jerusalem as a necessity for the Church of his day,” transcending Jerusalem’s “eschatological mystique”, detaching it from the Parosia ([Davies 1974](#), pp. 255–60).

Yet, Jerusalem is mentioned repeatedly in Paul's letters as the place of early Christian leadership and authority. One of the abbreviated designations for the Peter and James leadership is "Jerusalem". The city of Jerusalem features prominently in the Book of Acts and is considered the geographic location of the central community and its leadership.

Place is a space with meaning and value (Cresswell 2004, pp. 7, 10, 15) that involves the human experience.² For Paul and the author of Acts, "Jerusalem" is a "place," an articulated spatial concept. What is essential is not just Jerusalem's geographical characteristics of "space", but its meaning.³ It is not only "where" but "what". It is not difficult then to connect the idea that frequent references to Jerusalem in Paul's letters and Acts may teach us a lot about the worldview of Paul and Luke.

This article will show that Paul uses "Jerusalem" as a shorthand for describing the community headed by the apostle Peter and James, the brother of Jesus. In so doing, he assumes that there are several characteristics that the apostles and the Jewish capital city have in common. Perhaps this is related to Paul's reference and acknowledgment of the leadership of "the Pillars" as the central authority of the entire Jesus movement. Similarly, in the Book of Acts, Luke takes every opportunity to remind the reader that the location of the movement's leadership is in Jerusalem. By so doing, Luke is delivering a message to the reader that in addition to his commitment to precision and order in his narratology, the apostles do not merely live in Jerusalem but are also reclaiming it. The evidence from Paul's letters suggests that Luke's message is authentic and that Peter and James relate their authority and spiritual integrity to their activities centered in and from Jerusalem.

2. Paul and the Central Community in Jerusalem

A common scholarly designation is "the Jerusalem church" for the community headed by Peter and later James, the brother of Jesus. Yet, there could have been several alternative ways to designate this specific community directed by the first apostles. Jesus's disciples and relatives are known as "the pillars" of the Jerusalem church (Gal 2:9). Even so, the common descriptor Paul uses for the leadership of the church in Jerusalem is simply the placename "Jerusalem". Paul declares: "from Jerusalem and as far around as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the gospel". (Rom 15:19).⁴ Here, Jerusalem seems to be the original place from which the gospel spread. Paul may consider the so-called Jerusalem church as having priority simply because it was the first community of believers in Jesus.

Paul details his religious biography in the first letter to the Galatians and describes his contacts and encounters with the movement's leadership, the first apostles. At first, he mentions that these apostles were in Jerusalem and implies that meeting them was not his priority:

But when God, who had set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, was pleased ¹⁶to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with any human being, ¹⁷nor did I go up (*anēlthon*) to Jerusalem to those who were already apostles before me, but I went away at once into Arabia, and afterwards I returned to Damascus (Gal 1:15–17).⁵

These leaders are described by the fact that they were apostles "before me" who lived in Jerusalem. Both aspects mark their hierarchy or leadership in relation to Paul's early career as an apostle.

However, several years later, Paul adds, he went to meet Peter and James in Jerusalem.

Then after three years, I did go up (*anēlthon*) to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days; ¹⁹but I did not see any other apostle except James the Lord's brother (Gal 1:18–19).

Paul also mentions the apostles' geographical location here, although this must have been a well-known fact to his readers. The fact that he repeats it in verse 18 shows that this location is meaningful to him. The movement's leadership sat in a strategic place. Paul's double use of the verb *anēlthon*, meaning "go up" (cf. John 6:3, when Jesus goes to the mountain; *Ant.* 6:314) attests to the importance of Jerusalem and may perhaps echo a

sense of pilgrimage, whether he resisted it (in the first citation) or practiced it after all. The apostles dwell at a “higher” or more important and central place.

The third occurrence of Jerusalem in this Galatian passage is associated more closely with the Christian leadership in Jerusalem. The city of Jerusalem seems to have become synonymous with the leading apostles:

Then after fourteen years, I went up again to *Jerusalem* with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. ²I went up in response to a revelation. Then I laid before them (though only in a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running, or had not run, in vain (Gal 2:1–2).

Paul identifies “them” with the city of Jerusalem, as if Peter and James and the “acknowledged leaders” rule the entire city of Jerusalem. This is the only case in which Paul seems to designate the Christian leadership “Jerusalem”. He equates them with the authority of the Jewish national leadership and considers them to have authority equivalent to that of the high priests. Paul’s return to Jerusalem is initiated by a revelation, making this visit a spiritual journey.

Later, in the letter to the Romans, Paul alludes to the Christian community as living in Jerusalem and calls it “the saints”:

I am going (*poreuomai*) to *Jerusalem* in a ministry to *the saints*; for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among *the saints at Jerusalem*; ... I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my ministry to *Jerusalem* may be acceptable to *the saints* (Rom 15:25, 31).

Intriguingly, in this short passage, Paul repeats the identification of Jerusalem and the saints three times! While this designation is not exclusive to the Jerusalem community (Trebilco 2012, pp. 128–58), the fact that Paul collects money for these particular saints in Jerusalem may imply that they were considered more holy than the other so-called saints. Paul’s journey is connected to the so-called collection, bringing money, which the diaspora communities gathered and sent to the Jerusalem community and its leadership.⁶ Paul also describes the saints in Jerusalem in 1 Corinthians and in the same context of sending them “the collection,” a monetary gift.

Now concerning the collection for the *saints*; ... And when I arrive, I will send any whom you approve with letters to take your gift to *Jerusalem* (1 Cor 16: 1, 3).

In Romans and 1 Corinthians, Jerusalem is described as a geographical and religious center. There is traffic of people (namely, Paul) and money from Macedonia and Achaia to Jerusalem. This money was consecrated for a higher purpose, to nourish those who are (more?) holy. For the reader, Jerusalem seems sanctified also because of the saints who dwell there. Is it possible that the saints are acknowledged as such also because they live in Jerusalem, a holy city? Admittedly, “the saints” is a common designation in the New Testament and is hardly limited to the members of the Jerusalem community. One may only postulate that the term “saint” originated within the community of the apostles (Jewett 2006, p. 927 and references). The probable meaning of the designation is that they are sanctified in Jesus Christ or sanctified to God because they believed in Christ.⁷ In any event, the saints’ identification with Jerusalem seems customary for Paul.

There is another case in Paul’s letters where “the collection” is addressed to the saints, this time without referring to Jerusalem. In 2 Corinthians 9:1, he writes:

Now it is not necessary for me to write to you about the ministry to the *saints* ... for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the *saints* but also overflows with many thanksgivings to God. (2 Cor 9: 1, 12).

Here, Paul regards the apostles’ leadership as central and accepts their authority. Indeed, the entire enterprise in which Paul collected money from members of the non-Jewish

communities for the community headed by the apostles in Jerusalem attests to the hierarchical structure of the early Christian movement and the central place of the Jerusalem community. The letter is addressed to “the poor,” which was probably an honorific title (Georgi 1992, pp. 31–35). After the incident in Antioch, Paul’s collection project was changed to include all non-Jewish communities (Wedderburn 2002, pp. 98–99). It was not only a financial but also a spiritual goal: “Indeed they (the non-Jews) owe it to them (the members of the Jewish church in Jerusalem); for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material things” (Rom 15:27). The collection had an ecumenical and cultic purpose, symbolizing the unity of Jews and Gentiles under Christ. It created a *koinonia*, a partnership-forming contribution with the Jerusalem church. At the same time, it also formed a partnership between the Pauline churches. The collection may also have been an act of benefaction in which the Pauline Gentile churches wished to achieve the recognition and appreciation of the Jerusalem leadership, quite like the dynamics among Greco-Roman voluntary associations, including synagogues.⁸

Paul associates the apostles’ leadership with Jerusalem (probably because they live there). In Gal 2:1, he actually designates them simply as “Jerusalem”. Their association with the Jewish city linked the apostles with the Temple. The city played a significant regional role in Judaea and the Eastern Mediterranean internationally. Its mythic history in the Hebrew Bible only enhanced its mystique. Perhaps linking the apostles to Jerusalem enhanced the centralized administration and authority of the early church leaders and maybe it also bestowed on them the glory and reverence only Jerusalem can inspire.⁹

This point is especially intriguing in the letter to the Galatians, which attests to Paul’s complicated relationship with the leadership in Jerusalem. In the first two chapters, Paul establishes his authority and legitimacy as an apostle within the general movement.¹⁰ But when turning to the so-called incident in Antioch, Paul exposes the tension with the “certain people” who “came from James,” whose very presence caused Peter and Barnabas to move away from the table fellowship of Jews and Gentiles, that is, to forge a separation between Jews and non-Jews who share the belief in Jesus (Gal 2:11–14). Curiously, here Paul does *not* mention that these people came to Antioch from Jerusalem! Paul claimed that he admonished Cephas “before them all, ‘If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how *can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?*’” (Gal 2:14). Throughout the rest of the letter, Paul preaches against the attitude that he seems to attribute to these “certain people”—the call for Gentiles to convert to Judaism and observe the Law to be saved by Christ.¹¹

Perhaps this tension serves as an appropriate context for another interesting Pauline passage that relates to Jerusalem, this time in a symbolic fashion:

²¹Tell me, you who desire to be subject to the law, will you not listen to the law?

²²For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and the other by a free woman. ²³One, the child of the slave, was born according to the flesh; the other, the child of the free woman, was born through the promise.

²⁴Now, this is an allegory: these women are two covenants. One woman, in fact, is Hagar, from Mount Sinai, bearing children for slavery. ²⁵Now Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to *the present Jerusalem*, for she is in slavery with her children. ²⁶But the other woman corresponds to *the Jerusalem above*; she is free, and she is our mother (Galatians 4:22–26).¹²

While creating a complex analogy of two women and two covenants, strangely identifying Hagar with Mount Sinai,¹³ Paul introduces an opposition between present tense, earthly Jerusalem (*tē nun Ierousalēm*), and the Jerusalem above (*hē de anō Ierousalēm*), namely, the heavenly one. The contrast and its place in Pauline theology and spirituality deserve a separate discussion.¹⁴ Even so, this passage shows that the notion of Jerusalem as a place is something that Paul has in mind. The present Jerusalem stands for the Law, the covenant in Sinai. It is something traditional and stable. Readers and commentators remain per-

plexed as to whether this earthly Jerusalem represents Judaism before Christ or the gospel of the early Christian leaders in Jerusalem, which Paul challenges in Galatians.

In any event, Paul wishes to offer something here that transcends the common religious experience. He designates it as the free woman and “Jerusalem above”. Though Paul’s intended meaning is unclear, he uses Jerusalem as a symbol to offer his vision of the covenant. “Jerusalem” becomes a nomenclature for an entire belief system, encasing it in a promising designation. How these two concepts of Jerusalem fit into the conflict with the Judaizers in Galatia and what might have been the consequences of Paul’s attitude toward the apostles’ leadership in Jerusalem must be left to a subsequent study.

3. Jerusalem in Acts: Hometown and Metropolis

Jerusalem (*Ierousalēm* and *Hierosolūma*)¹⁵ is mentioned fifty-nine times in the Acts of the Apostles. One reason for these multiple references is that most of the events in the Book of Acts occur in Jerusalem. However, a brief study of how many times the other gospels mention Jerusalem reveals that the Gospel of Luke mentions it far more than any other gospel (see Table 1).

Table 1. Occurrences of Jerusalem in the gospels and Acts (Bachmann 1980, pp. 13–66; Bormann 2019, p. 115).

Mark	Matthew	John	Luke	Acts
11	12	13	32	59

Luke highlights Jerusalem as the setting of early Christianity, famously in Luke 1–2 in the nativity of Jesus when he is dedicated in the Temple in Jerusalem. The Book of Acts also highlights and focuses on Jerusalem, most likely because the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts share the same author, Luke.

Scholarship on the role of Jerusalem in Luke Acts tends to concentrate on the Temple (Chance 1988; Bachmann 2011; Smith 2017) or Jerusalem as a hostile political entity (Bruce 1985) rather than “a place” (Bachmann 1980; Bormann 2019). Yet the many references of Jerusalem in Acts are not merely the result of a necessary geographical description or simply a factual statement that Peter, James, and the apostles lived and acted in this city.¹⁶ Instead, the frequency demonstrates the city’s significance as a concept and a symbol for Luke. There is substantial evidence in Acts that relates to Jerusalem’s role as both the locus of the events of Christ’s life and the subsequent genesis of the early church. Luke seems to pay special attention to Jerusalem as a hometown and metropolis of the early Christian movement. Oddly, the standard scholarly designation “the church in Jerusalem” (*tēs ekklēsias tēs ousēs en Ierousalēm*) appears only once in Acts (11:22), as well as one parallel designation of “the apostles and elders who were in Jerusalem” (16:4, the decision of the apostolic council).

Still, these designations show that the settlement in the city was a key feature of the community or leadership.

Luke mentions the term “the saints in Jerusalem” (9:13; see also 26:10), a term used by Paul, as described previously. The “saints” is an original and familiar name for the Jerusalem community. In Acts, Luke stresses that Jerusalem is the appropriate place for the apostles. There is a reason why they were there at the beginning of the gospel and why they should stay in this city, despite persecution.¹⁷

At the very beginning of Acts, Jesus ordered the apostles “not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father” (Acts 1:4). Jesus said to them that “you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (1:8). The exact location of the apostles is stressed immediately after this revelation, as the apostles “returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem” (1:12).

The Pentecost event happened among “Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem” (2:5). Perhaps this holy experience could have occurred only here, in the

most sacred city. Additionally, they may also have been centered in Jerusalem because they needed to preach to the people of Jerusalem and move them to repentance (Tannehill 1990, pp. 24–26). Flashbacks to Jesus also mention this city: Gentiles have heard what Jesus did “in Judea and in Jerusalem” (10:39). Paul says that “the residents of Jerusalem” rejected Jesus and that he was raised from the dead and “appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem” (13:27, 31).

Luke employs a “geographical theology” of Jerusalem in his gospel and the Book of Acts, relating to it as a religious center of early Christianity, known in its nascent period as “the way”. He also introduces Jerusalem as the place from which the belief in Jesus is born and the place from which the gospel spreads to the world.¹⁸ Anna, the prophetess, speaks highly of the young Jesus to “all who were looking for the redemption for Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38, for this reading, see Bachmann 2011, p. 64). Jerusalem is also mentioned as the place of the ascension of Jesus (Luke 9:51 and Acts 1:2, 11). After Jesus’s resurrection, the apostles’ gospel begins from Jerusalem, the appropriate place for the apostles (Luke 24:46–51 and Acts 1:4).¹⁹

Indeed, even when mere location is involved, Jerusalem’s name is spelled out repeatedly. In most cases, this information is unnecessary. Jerusalem is mentioned frequently as the geographical setting of the narrative, to remind the reader of the close spatial linkage between the followers of Jesus and Jerusalem. Luke wants to show that the apostles are active in Jerusalem and among the Jerusalemites.

A few pertinent examples: Judas’s death became known to “all the residents of Jerusalem” (1:19). Peter preaches to “all who live in Jerusalem” (2:14). The miracles (“signs”) of the apostles are “obvious to all who live in Jerusalem” (4:16). People from the towns around Jerusalem came to the apostles so that they would cure them (5:16). Peter and the apostles are accused that they “have filled Jerusalem with your teaching” (5:28). When the apostles are successful “the number of the disciples increased greatly in Jerusalem” (6:7). But shortly after, the persecutions begin from Jerusalem (8:1). “The apostles at Jerusalem” heard that Samaria had accepted the word of God (8:14), and after proclaiming the gospel there, Peter and John returned to Jerusalem (8:25). Peter returns to Jerusalem after converting Cornelius (11:2). And prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch, one of them named Agabus (11:27).

Luke also makes considerable efforts to relate Paul to Jerusalem. He mentions five visits of Paul to the city since his conversion, and in four of them (all but Acts 18:22), Luke explicitly refers to Jerusalem. Some of these visits do not involve any singular event. Paul just comes and goes. Others are more significant. For example, Paul’s conversion sees him coming from Jerusalem (Acts 9:26–30). After his conversion, Paul is sent back to Jerusalem from Antioch (11:30). Luke mentions that Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem in Acts 12:24. He visited Jerusalem on his way from Ephesus to Antioch when he merely greeted the *ekklēsia* (18:22). He also came to Jerusalem for the apostolic council (his arrival to the city is mentioned explicitly in Acts 15:2, 4). And finally, he arrived before his arrest (21:17ff.). Interestingly, before this last visit, we are told that Paul plans to visit the city (19:21) and is eager to see it (20:16, 22). The beginning of his journey to the city and his safe arrival are also mentioned (21:15, 17). Paul then says he is ready to die in Jerusalem (21:13). Surely, more than travel information is involved here.

In Acts, Paul himself attests to his attachment to the city. In his hearing and trial, Paul stresses his activities in Jerusalem four different times (22:17, 18; 24:11; and 26:20). Jesus is revealed to Paul, saying, “you have testified for me in Jerusalem” (23:11). And finally, Paul tells the local leaders of the Jewish communities in Rome that he was handed over to the Romans in *Hierosolyma* (28:17).

Therefore, the Acts narrative aims to link the apostles and Paul to the city and clarify that it was the locus of their activity. Jerusalem is an essential component of the story, and this is indeed not an exclusive matter of informative geography but rather *hagio*-geography and theology. Luke tries to show that Jerusalem is the hometown of the apostles and the

early Christian movement and that their activity is central to this metropolis. The mission activities and other important decisions were planned and managed from this center.

Yet Luke ends Acts with Paul's arrest in Rome, where he preaches that salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles (Acts 28: 11–31). This may suggest that Luke wants the Jesus movement to obtain a new and new universal center.

For Luke/Acts, Jerusalem also has other, far less pleasant connotations. It is the locus of the rejection of Jesus, a place of conflict (e.g., Acts 10:39–40; 13:27–32; and [Tannehill 1990](#), p. 35). The debates, clashes, and persecutions all take place in Jerusalem, but in these contexts, in most cases, its name is not mentioned repeatedly as in the other examples above. Hence, there is a certain ambivalence about whether Jerusalem carries a positive or negative sense in Acts. This duality also concerns Luke's treatment of the people of Jerusalem (which deserves a separate study, see, e.g., [Tannehill 1990](#), p. 60).

4. Jerusalem as the Place of the Jesus Movement: Geo-Hagiography in Paul and Acts

Scholars have suggested several explanations for the attitude toward Jerusalem in Paul's letters and Acts. Walker concluded that it is important for Luke to show that the gospel originated in Jerusalem because it shows that "the Christian message was an authentic version of Judaism". Jesus's ministry and the apostolic mission should have been "publicly within the heart of Judaism's mother-city". Walker follows several previous scholars with this idea ([Walker 1996](#), pp. 84–85). Lohse argued that Paul saw the new people of God centered in "God's chosen city" ([Lohse 1976](#), pp. 333–36). And [Bruce \(1968, p. 4\)](#) concluded that "Paul looks on Jerusalem as the earthly metropolis of the new Israel".

There is sufficient evidence to substantiate the assertions that the historical Paul and the so-called Jerusalem church, as portrayed in Acts, both view Jerusalem as the center of the apostles' activity. This claim gives their identity as Christ followers and missionary activists a sense of legitimacy, namely, that they are not a marginal or separatist movement.²⁰ The basis in Jerusalem was necessary so that potential converts would take Peter, Paul, Barnabas, etc., more seriously as representatives of a legitimate branch of Judaism.²¹

Yet the linkage between the early Christian community and the city of Jerusalem was more potent than this. It is not only a location. When Paul designates it simply as "Jerusalem" (Gal 2:1) and Luke makes every effort to stress it as the setting for the apostles' activity, they aim at a higher concept. Paul and Luke do not merely want their readers to know that the leadership of the Jesus movement operates from the Jewish capital. They want them to *associate* the movement with Jerusalem. In their eyes, the apostles' community becomes *identical* to Jerusalem. The early Christians *are* Jerusalem. Geography becomes hagiography.

The centrality of Jerusalem as a theological rather than a geographical concept also explains the goal of Paul's collection for Jerusalem. Like the Jews throughout the Mediterranean who sent half-shekel tributes and other donations to the Temple, Pauline communities sent it to the "saints," now synonymous with "Jerusalem". The money reached a sacred cause, as the community and the city became one.

Reading the central role of Jerusalem as the place and significant feature of the apostles' community in Acts may be seen as a literary creation of Luke. It may reflect Luke's ideology as a gifted author who wrote a well-crafted volume in the late first century CE. However, because we find this idea already in Galatians and Paul acknowledges it despite his problematic relations with "the Pillars" of Jerusalem, there is good reason to conclude that, in this case, Acts represents the authentic ideology of the early Christian leadership in Jerusalem. Indeed, Paul's collection for the Jerusalem saints speaks louder than words. Jerusalem lies at the heart of the Jesus movement.

The association—or rather, identification—of the apostles' community with Jerusalem should be understood in light of what "Jerusalem" symbolized in the first century CE. Jerusalem is the city of the Temple, a pilgrimage target, and the Judean leadership's location. Jerusalem is a Jewish myth, especially for those living in the diaspora, who knew it mainly through Scripture. It was the capital of the Davidic monarchy, the home of most bib-

litical prophets, such as Isaiah and Jeremiah, and the subject of most prophecies. Jerusalem is biblical Zion, which reflects the Judeans of the first and early second Temple periods as people and symbolizes their belief in God. And, of course, it is the subject of biblical prophecies of the End of Days (for the legacy of biblical Jerusalem, see [Fohrer 1976](#); [Levenson 1985](#), pp. 89–178; [Tan 1997](#), pp. 23–54). Luke, I suggest, wants Jerusalem's sacredness and history as the city that God had chosen to become one with the perception of the apostles' authority and mission, and through them, perhaps to the entire Jesus movement.

One way to examine the impact of the image of Jerusalem on Paul is the concept of Zion, a synonym for Jerusalem. Zion is a prevalent term, especially in the books of Isaiah and Psalms ([Hoppe 2000](#); [Oosting 2013](#)). Paul, too, certainly has Zion on his mind. He uses Isa 28:16 in Rom 9:33 and cites Isa 59:20–21 (“Out of Zion will come the Deliverer”) in Rom 11:26–27.²²

Biblical Zion is not only another name for the city of Jerusalem, it is also a synonym or symbol for the city's people or its community: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace . . . who announces salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns’”. (Isa 52:7); “But Zion said, ‘The Lord has forsaken me, my Lord has forgotten me’” (Isa 49:14). “Zion hears and is glad, and the daughters of Judah rejoice, because of your judgments, O God” (Ps 97:8). Indeed, the prophets use the name of Jerusalem itself as a designation for the inhabitants of the city: “Rouse yourself, rouse yourself! Stand up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk at the hand of the Lord the cup of his wrath...” (Isa 51:17; see also Jer 4:11).

This identification of Zion/Jerusalem the city with its habitants is like what we have found in Gal 2:1 and close to what I suggested as the meaning of the association of Jerusalem and the apostles' community. The people are being united with the city. Like the Jerusalemites being called Zion or Jerusalem, the apostles are identified as “Jerusalem”.

Using “Jerusalem” as a designation for a religious group is attested to in contemporaneous sources. The Qumran *Yahad* opposed “the last priests of Jerusalem” (1QpHab 9:4), “the arrogant men (אנשי הלצון) who are in Jerusalem” (4Q162pIsa^b II 6–7), and “the seekers of smooth things (דורשי החלקות) who are in Jerusalem” (4Q163pIsa^c 23 II 10–11). However, these designations use “Jerusalem” as a locative part of the group's name and do not refer to them as “Jerusalem” per se. Much closer to the Pauline use is found in rabbinic literature. We see “the holy community of Jerusalem” (קהילא קדישא דבירושלם) in ca. 200 CE headed by R. Simon ben Menasia and R. Yose ben ha-Meshulah, who live in Jerusalem and pay particular importance to prayer. Perhaps they are called holy because they are meticulous in purity practices related to table fellowship ([Safrai 1957](#)). Jerusalem seems to be more than a location of this community; it has become a distinctive designation. Even so, it is essential to note that it was coined when Jews were hardly allowed by the Romans to live in Jerusalem. Hence its location was exceptional.

Place in spatial theory should be considered concerning the centrality of Jerusalem in Paul's writings and Luke/Acts. It may illuminate several interesting aspects of the ideology of the apostles' community who consider themselves to be “Jerusalem” and the center of Judaism. The evidence from Paul's letters and Acts may attest to the relations of place to ideas of hegemony and resistance. First, it is essential to note that religion is related to place: “all widely practiced forms of religion are, in the final analysis, attempts at establishing places that answer human needs” ([Tuan and Strawn 2010](#), p. 15). The place for Paul and Luke is Jerusalem, which provides identity, a “persistent sameness, and unity which allows that [place] to be differentiated from others”. Relph describes this persistent identity in terms of three components: (1) the place's physical setting; (2) its activities, situations, and events; and, most important to our concern here, (3) the individual and group meanings created through people's experiences and intentions about that place ([Relph 1976](#), p. 45).

Place relates to power relations and control and to “owning” a place. One either dominates a place or resists those who own it ([Cresswell 1996](#), p. 163). It is either a place of dominance or a place of resistance beyond ‘power’. “The imagined political geography of

location is intended to resist a politics where the spaces of difference and differentiation are erased" (Pile and Michael 1997, pp. 5, 28). Interestingly, both angles of place—domination and resistance—are found in the abovementioned evidence. On the one hand, in Acts, Peter and the apostles act in the city time and again, and its holiness shapes their identity. On the other hand, they are persecuted and arrested in the city (and Stephen is executed by the Jerusalem mob).

Looking at Galatians 1–2, "Jerusalem" seems to be a source of power that Paul reacts to, acknowledges, and conforms to. He accepts the centrality of "the Pillars", although he does express irony or reluctance (Dunn 1993, p. 105). The fact that money is sent repeatedly from the Pauline churches to the one in Jerusalem expresses power relations. At the same time, the events in Acts show that the apostles' community is both flourishing and being persecuted. It regards itself as dominant, but its leaders are arrested, and some of them are executed by the real leaders of Jerusalem—the high priests and King Agrippa I (see also the execution of James in *Ant.* 20.200). Indeed, from the perspective of Acts, the Jerusalemite identity of the apostles is an act of resistance to the Jewish leadership and its followers. It is a Jerusalem within Jerusalem, a community that wishes to grow and become the authentic, dominating Jerusalem.²³

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Notes

- ¹ "Luke is able to solve the problems ... how can the Church ... break away from Jerusalem" (Conzelmann 1961, p. 212). A somewhat similar approach towards the Temple is attributed to Stephen (Acts 7:48–50, citing Isa. 66:1–2), but the conclusions drawn from his speech are quite overrated (Regev 2019, pp. 175–79 and references).
- ² (Tuan 1977). This understanding of place is similar to the definitions of mental space (how space is perceived) and social space (how it is practiced and experienced). See (Lefebvre 1991; Soja 1996).
- ³ NT scholarship has already begun to acknowledge the role of space. See: (Stewart 2010, 2012; van den Heever 2010; Schreiner 2016; Horrell 2020).
- ⁴ Yet, Bruce (1968, pp. 3–4) regards this passage as having merely symbolic meaning. Bruce (1968, p. 4, n. 4) also, relates 1 Cor 14:36, "Did the word of God originate with you?" to Isa 2:3 and Mic 4:2, which declares that the word of the Lord goes out from Jerusalem. It is interesting to mention the view that Jerusalem, and not his native Tarsus, was the city of Paul's boyhood and upbringing (van Unnik 1962).
- ⁵ Translations follow the NRSV, unless noted otherwise.
- ⁶ On Paul's commitment to the Jerusalem community see (Jewett 2006, pp. 927, 936–37).
- ⁷ (Trebilco 2012, pp. 122–63). Compare the holy people/community in the Qumran *Yahad*: 1QS 5:13, 20; 8:17, 20.
- ⁸ (Downs 2008). On the collection, see also 1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8:1–9:15; cf. Gal 2:10; Rom 15:25–31 (cf. the possible references in Acts 11:27–30; 24:17); (Nickle 1966; Joubert 2000; Downs 2006).
- ⁹ The exclusive status of the Jerusalem community is somewhat challenged however in Eph. 2:19: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are *citizens* with the *saints* and also members of the household of God".
- ¹⁰ Paul has a complex relationship with the leading apostles in which he acknowledges their authority but nevertheless retains his independence as an apostle. See (Dunn 1982; 1990, pp. 108–26).
- ¹¹ For the view that the incident in Antioch is the key for the identity of the Judaizers in Galatia, see (Elmer 2009).
- ¹² Translation follows (Martyn 2004, pp. 431–32).
- ¹³ (de Boer 2011, pp. 290–301), also noting that Paul innovates the designation "the free woman" or Sarah (p. 291).
- ¹⁴ (Martyn 2004, pp. 440–41), sees here a contrast between "the Jerusalem church, at present satisfied to house the False Brothers with their ungodly support of the enslaving Law-observant mission to Gentiles," and "the true church of God". However, (Betz 1979, p. 246), argued that the present Jerusalem stands for "the political and religious institution of Judaism," that is, Judaism in general. See also (Bruce 1982, pp. 220–21).
- ¹⁵ On the difference and occurrences of these two forms for Jerusalem and Luke's use of them, see (Sylva 1983).
- ¹⁶ On Luke's geographical knowledge of Jerusalem, see (Kloppenborg 2017, pp. 7–10).
- ¹⁷ That many of these persecutions derived from the Christians activities in the Temple and the suspicions about their attitude towards it, see (Regev 2010; 2019, pp. 179–96).
- ¹⁸ For the view that for Luke Jerusalem is the center of the world (*axis mundi*), see (Sylva 1990, pp. 153–69, esp. 160).

- 19 On the stay in Jerusalem as a theme which connects Luke and Acts, see (Tannehill 1990, p. 11).
- 20 On the non-sectarian character of early Christianity, see (Regev 2011). Note, however, that the community of goods, namely, the shared property ownership (Acts 2:45; 4:32) resembles that of the sectarian Essenes and the Qumran *Yahad*.
- 21 Other aspects of the early Christian quest for legitimacy within Judaism were the interest and involvement in the Temple (Regev 2019), and their fluid social structure and benign social messages (Regev 2016).
- 22 (Bruno 2008, pp. 119–34). There are no allusions to Zion in Acts, but it may be relevant to mention that Luke (or his sources) has a special interest in the prophet Isaiah, the prophet who alluded to Zion more than any other. Luke mentions Isaiah in Acts 8:28, 30; 28:25 (see also Luke 2:30–32 citing Isa 49:6 and 4:17 on Jesus reading from the book of Isaiah in the synagogue, and the allusion to Isa 49:6:6–8 in Luke 2:32).
- 23 Space does not permit here to discuss when and how Jerusalem and specific sites within it acquired religious significance in early Christianity according to other NT texts (See Wright 1994; Regev 2019). As for later times, according to Eusebius, after the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans, Jewish Christians remained in the city, headed by bishops who became leading Christian figures (Wilken 1992, p. 84 and references). In the fourth century Christian worship settled in several holy places, such as the church of the Holy Sepulcher (Walker 1990, pp. 199–308) and pilgrims arrived from afar. In terms of theology, some Christian thinkers, such as Cyril of Jerusalem, continued to stress Jerusalem's holiness as divine and chosen by God. Eusebius, however, believed that Jerusalem had lost its biblical sacred status and only specific Christian sites are holy (Walker 1990, pp. 35–50; Wilken 1992, pp. 146–47).

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