

35 Pella

Names (also known as)

Greek – Pella, Pelea
Arabic - Khirbet Fahil

Etymology

The etymology for the original Macedonian city Pella (birthplace of Alexander) from which the ancient city in Jordan derived its name, is taken from the Ancient Macedonian word *pélla* (πέλλα), "stone" and forming with the prefix a- the Doric *apella*, meaning in this case fence, enclosure of stone. The word *apella* originally meant fold, fence for animals, and then assembly of people.

Another suggested etymology is that Pella originally meant "defensible citadel on a cliff", and this etymology is backed by the numerous ancient cities throughout Greece with similar name, i.e. Pellana, Pallene, Palle, Pelle, Pelion, Palamede, Pellene, etc.

Location/Description



Pella is located in the Jordan valley some 100 km north of Amman, the capital of Jordan.

Scriptural references

New Testament

Matt. 24:16; Mark 13:14; Luke 21:21 – “Flee to the mountains”.



Brief history

The site of Pella has been continuously occupied from antiquity. First mentioned in the 19th century BC in Egyptian inscriptions, its name was Hellenised to Pella, perhaps to honour Alexander the Great's birthplace in Macedonia. The Roman city, of which some spectacular ruins remain, supplanted the Hellenistic city. During this period Pella was one of the cities making up the Decapolis. The city was the site of one of Christianity's earliest churches. According to Eusebius of Caesarea it was a refuge for Jerusalem Christians in the 1st century AD who fled the Jewish–Roman wars. The city is also the site of the battle between Byzantine troops and Muslim invading forces in 635 AD at the Battle of Fahl.

The city proper was destroyed by the Golan earthquake of 749. A small village remains in the area. Only small portions of the ruins have been excavated.

Possible connections

Was Pella visited by our Lord?

Christ travelled through the “midst of the coasts of the Decapolis” (Mark 7:31). There may have been a number of recipients of the truth from this area that welcomed those from Jerusalem, and if so, likely to be those with some means to extend the degree of hospitality to assure their arrival into the city. This may be speculation, but what is true is...“Flee to the mountains”. Christ warned his

disciples to flee from Jerusalem at the coming of Roman troops in AD66 - Matt. 24:15.

Pella and the Roman Conquest of 68-70 AD

During the break in the siege of Jerusalem, after the withdrawal of Cestius Gallus, many believers fled to Pella ^(7b,8,9,12) – a city in the upper eastern Jordan valley, with some fleeing to mount Lebanon. ⁽¹⁴⁾

This is ironic in some ways as Pompey had taken Pella as part of a supply base for his push from Jericho to take Jerusalem. ⁽¹⁻⁶⁾ The importance of the city is marked by the presence of Roman roads extending from the city, remnants can be seen today towards Ajlun. ⁽¹¹⁾ It was a city of the Decapolis named after the birth place of Alexander the Great, and marked the northern boundary of Paraea. ^(1b) The area of Pella was described by Eusebius as “the mountain district of Pella” ⁽⁷⁾ and importantly an area outside the control of the Sanhedrin. ⁽¹³⁾ The closest Biblical site from Pella was around 10 km to Jabesh Gilead (Eusebius describes it as being 6 miles from Pella en-route to Geresia. ^(11b)



It is also poetic that those that fled would form the kernel for ecclesias who became the witness to the ongoing care of God for the covenant made to their fathers, much the same as the parable of 2 Sam. 21, where finally the bones of the nation were brought back into the land of their father’s sepulchres.

The counsel of false prophets

The community of believers was faced with a decision to listen to advice from false prophets who claimed that Jerusalem would never be abandoned by God. The final irony was the confinement of many of these in the temple precinct itself on similar advice: “The cause of this destruction,” at the burning of the temple, says their own historian, “was a false prophet, who on that day proclaimed to those in the city, ‘God commands to go up to the temple, to receive the signs of deliverance’”. ^(2b) This echoed the advice given in the time of Jeremiah 38:20,23; 27:9,10,19. Eusebius indicates there is no record of a single Christian dying at Jerusalem. ⁽⁸⁾

The value of Bible understanding

The direct movement of the Jewish believers from Jerusalem to Pella confirmed the understanding of the prophecy of Daniel, Matt. 24:14; and also the language of Zech. 11:10, 11:

“I took my staff, even Beauty, and cut it asunder, that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people. And it was broken in that day: and so the poor of the flock that waited upon me knew that it was the word of the LORD”.

Christadelphian Hymn Book

Hymn 390 in the 2002 Christadelphian Hymn Book omits a verse that appeared in the 1932 book (Hymn 244). This was verse 3 of 4 verses (see below):

Who was saved when heav’n’s vast fountains
Did their flood of death begin,
And all flesh on plains and mountains,
Perished in that age of sin?
Only Noah, and his fam’ly,
In the ark, by God ‘shut in.’

Who was saved from direst horror
At that unexpected hour,
Wherein Sodom and Gomorrah
Sank o’erwhelm’d, to rise no more?—
Lot the faithful, and his daughters,
Were alone removed to Zoar.

Who was saved when desolation
Fell on Salem’s guilty head?
When th’ accurs’d ‘abomination’
All ‘the holy place’ o’spread?
Friends of Jesus,
They alone to **Pella** fled!

We shall fear not then, nor tremble,
When the last dread trump shall sound—
Safely to Him we’ll assemble,
Gathering our Redeemer round:

And before Him, by God’s mercy,
We shall stand in glory crowned.

Apostasy from Pella

It appears that an apostasy from the ecclesia formed the Ebionites, strictly observing circumcision and Jewish ceremony, who only accepted the gospel of Matthew, considering it the “Hebrew gospel”, denying the miraculous nature of Christ’s birth, teaching rather that the spirit was endowed on Christ only from the time of his baptism, and in particular they rejected the teachings of Paul, who was the champion of a new religion of grace in opposition to forms of law.

Sources:

Footnotes:

- (1) GA Smith Atlas of the historical geography of the holy land - section 40 (1b) pg 25
- 2) Josephus, i Wars, vii.-ix.; xiv Antiq, ii.-vi (2b) BJ 5.ii.3; 6.v.4
- 3) Strabo, Geog., xvi. 15;
- 3) Pliny, H.N., v. 16 [18];
- 4) Dion Cassius, xxxvii.;
- 5) Appian, Syr., L, li.,
- 6) G. A. Smith, H.G.H.L., 538-547; Jerusalem, i. 411, ii. 388
- 7) Eusebius Onomasticon 110:11-13 , (7b) Barnes notes on the bible vol 10 pg 635; vol 12 pg 29
- (8) Eusebius, Hist. Ecclesiastes, lib. 3.vi, 3.v
- (9) E Gibbon; Decline and fall of the Roman Empire pg. 254
- (10) ISBE vol 3 pg 386-391
- (11) Burton McDonald; East of the Jordan pg 141 (11b) pg 164
- (12) R Roberts; Nazareth revisited pg 375
- (13) Smiths Bible Dictionary “Apostle” pg 28
- (14) Footnote Diaglott - Matt 24:16

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