

The temple controversy in the four gospels

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**THE TEMPLE CONTROVERSY
IN THE FOUR GOSPELS**

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the S.T.L. Degree
from the Boston College School of Theology and Ministry**

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INTRODUCTION

Mk 11:15-17, Mt 21:12-13, Lk 19:45-46, and Jn 2:14-17 are the Gospel episodes that comprise the core of what has been commonly known as “the cleansing of the temple.” But this title already imposes an interpretation. What if these passages are not just about a cleansing? What if they are not only about the temple?

Scholars aspiring for a more neutral starting point have referred to the pericopes above as “Jesus’ temple act,” “the temple event,” or “the temple incident.” In this study’s attempt to join the conversation about what Jesus did in the temple, the episode in question will also be designated as “the temple controversy.”¹ This takes into account not only that Jesus’ actions in the temple proved controversial during his time but also that their meaning today still sparks controversy among historians, exegetes, and theologians.

Citing Mk 11:18 and Lk 19:47b and noting how the chief priests, scribes, and (in Luke) the leaders of the people were seeking to put Jesus to death after he cleared the temple precincts, many scholars have pointed out how the temple controversy led to Jesus’ arrest, trial, and crucifixion. While what Jesus did in the temple would have surely been a significant factor in the events that the synoptic Gospels report ensued in his last few days, we must not forget how Jesus was also opposed early on in his ministry, how Pharisees and Herodians were

¹E. P. Sanders also uses this phrase to refer to Jesus’ demonstration in the temple, one of the “almost indisputable facts” for which any interpretation of the life of Jesus, Sanders asserts, should be able to account. See E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 11.

already conspiring against him in Mk 3:6, and how the people in the synagogue wanted to hurl him down a hill even just as he began his ministry in Luke 4.

Proceeding from a different direction, E. P. Sanders emphasizes the importance of the temple controversy by using it as the entry point for examining Jesus' life. Sanders considers Jesus' temple act as "bedrock," a more secure and less ambiguous piece of evidence from which he can move to more uncertain evidence.² But he also suggests that the passage presented as Jesus' teaching in Mk 11:17 (and its parallels in Mt 21:13 and Lk 19:46), "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers,"³ contradicts what Jesus was trying to symbolize in his prophetic act.⁴ Redaction critics opine that Mk 11:17, a conflation of Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11, is most probably not the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus but the evangelist's interpretation of his action.⁵ Sanders, thus, does not give much importance to Mk 11:17 in his interpretation of the temple event. But the placement of Mk 11:17 right after Jesus' actions shows that the author of Mark intended this verse to shed light on what Jesus had just done. Can what the Gospels report as Jesus' words about his deeds just be dismissed? Sanders may be defended by arguing that he comes from the perspective of the historical Jesus, but the main sources of historical studies about Jesus are still Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John. Historical theories will always remain on the level of hypothesis. Many theories have already come and gone as the ideas they were

²Sanders, 10-11.

³*The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989). Unless otherwise noted, biblical quotations in this thesis are taken from this translation.

⁴Sanders, 66. This is also how J. R. Daniel Kirk reads Sanders in "Time for Figs, Temple Destruction, and Houses of Prayer in Mark 11:12-25," *Catholic Bible Quarterly* (July 2012): 510.

⁵J. Roloff considers Mk 11:17 an addition because of the introductory phrase "καὶ ἐδίδασκεν καὶ ἔλεγε αὐτοῖς." See Sanders, 66.

connected to have risen and fallen. But we have canonized these four Gospels, and their interpretations of the Jesus event are what we will continue to pass on through generations.

The main points of the last two paragraphs are paradigmatic for the approach of this thesis. While affirming the importance and the integrity of the temple scene, it will strive for a more contextualized reading and put Jesus' actions in the wider view of each Gospel's narrative and in relation to the scriptural texts alluded to by each evangelist. While it will at times seek the aid of historical studies, its main concern will be literary analysis. In the end, the validity of its conclusions will be judged in relation to the question "Can this be shown in the text?"

This thesis will now investigate the temple controversy in the Gospel according to Mark, whose presentation of this episode is the most detailed⁶ and, as will be shown, the most structured among the four Gospels. Shorter treatments of the Matthean and Lukan parallels will then follow in the second and third chapters. Many of the insights that can be gleaned from Mark are also applicable to the other two synoptic Gospels. What will be highlighted in this study's treatment of Matthew and Luke are the points where they differ from Mark and what these add to their particular ways of seeing Jesus. A fourth section on Jn 2:13-22 that continues this approach will round off this study.

⁶Clinton Wahlen analyzes the Greek text of the core temple event and shows how, while Mark's account is second to John in number of words (John has 74, and Mark 65; Matthew uses 45, and Luke is the most brief with only 25), Mark presents the most details (the sellers and buyers driven out, the money changers' tables overturned, the seats of the dove sellers overturned, and the carrying of vessels through the temple prohibited). See Clinton Wahlen, "The Temple in Mark and Contested Authority," *Biblical Interpretation* 15 (2007): 249.

CHAPTER I

THE TEMPLE CONTROVERSY IN MARK

Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written,

'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'?

But you have made it a den of robbers."

And when the chief priests and the scribes heard it, they kept looking for a way to kill him; for they were afraid of him, because the whole crowd was spellbound by his teaching (Mk 11:15-18).

A prophetic act?

Isaiah walked naked and barefoot as a sign that the king of Assyria would lead away the Egyptians as captives and the Ethiopians as exiles, "both the young and the old, naked and barefoot, with buttocks uncovered" (Isa 20:1-4). Jeremiah shattered a potter's jug in front of the elders and priests of Jerusalem as a sign that God would break the city and its people (Jer 19:1-13). Ezekiel, using a series of actions that ranged from building a miniature of Jerusalem sieged to burning and scattering his hair, prophesied against the house of Israel (Ezek 4-5). Can Jesus' actions in Mk 11:15-17 be read in the same vein as those prophetic acts of Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel?

Mark uses “Christ” almost like a surname for Jesus (Mk 1:1). When Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” and Peter declared, “You are the Messiah,” Jesus’ response was to sternly order them not to tell anyone (Mk 1:29-30). Jesus then began to teach them that he “must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mk 8:31). This was the first time Jesus predicted his passion, death, and resurrection, and this was a most explicit disclosure of what kind of Messiah Jesus was to be. It is clear that “Christ” or “Messiah” is central in Mark’s presentation of Jesus. But we must keep this in tension with the other lenses Mark gives us to see Jesus: Son of God, Son of David, and Son of Man, to name a few. The whole matter enters a deeper level not only when we acknowledge how these ways of seeing Jesus overlap but more so when we take into account Jesus’ own words, “No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak... no one puts new wine into old wineskins” (Mk 2:21-22). The old categories may be helpful as starting points, but we cannot just force Jesus into them. New wine must be poured into new wineskins.

Mark certainly portrays Jesus as more than a prophet, but Jesus is also presented with distinctively prophetic characteristics. During his baptism, Jesus saw the heavens torn apart and heard a voice from heaven (Mk 1:9-11). These events are similar to the prophetic commissioning of Isaiah who experienced a heavenly vision and also heard the voice of the Lord (Isa 6:1-8). Ezekiel, too, received visions as the heavens were opened before him (Ezek 1).

The Spirit descending on Jesus in Mk 1:10 can be read messianically, especially in the light of Isa 11:1-2 (“A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse... the spirit of the Lord shall rest on him...”), but it can also be read prophetically. Adela Yarbro Collins sees in Jesus’

endowment with the Spirit a prophetic installation as when Elisha was endowed with Elijah's spirit (2 Kgs 2:9,15).⁷ Elijah's call of Elisha in 1 Kgs 19:19-21 can also be likened to Jesus' call of his first disciples in Mk 1:16-20: Both Elijah and Jesus take the initiative; those who are called are in the middle of pursuing their livelihood – plowing a field and casting or mending nets; Elisha left his mother and father behind, and James and John left their father, Zebedee; and Elisha's remark to Elijah, "I will follow you" (1 Kgs 19:20), is mirrored by the Markan comment "And they followed him" (Mk 1:20).⁸ As Elisha healed Naaman the Syrian (2 Kgs 5), Jesus cleansed the leper in Mk 1:40-45. As Elijah raised the son of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kgs 17:17-24) and Elisha the son of the Shunammite (2 Kgs 4:8-37) from the dead, so Jesus restored the daughter of Jairus to life (Mk 5:22-43). As Elisha multiplied loaves to feed a hundred people (2 Kgs 4:42-44), Jesus satisfied an even greater number twice (Mk 6:35-44 and 8:1-10). Elisha cursing the boys who jeered at him in Bethel (2 Kgs 2:23-25) can also remind us of Jesus cursing a fig tree that had no fruit (Mk 11:12-14, 20-21).

Jesus may not have used the messenger formula ("Thus says Yahweh" or "Thus says the Lord God") of the classical prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel,⁹ but much of his speech falls under the prophetic categories Rudolf Bultmann classified as "preaching of salvation" (for example, Mk 8:35 and 10:29-30), "minatory sayings" (Mk 8:12,38; 10:23,25; and 12:38-

⁷Adela Yarbro Collins and Harold W. Attridge, *Mark: A Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*, Hermeneia — A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 46.

⁸Ibid., 48.

⁹See Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 98-128.

40), “admonitions” (Mk 1:15 and 13:33-37), and “apocalyptic predictions” (Mk 9:1,12-13; 13:2,5-31; 14:58; 15:29).¹⁰

Jesus also foretells his passion, death, and resurrection (Mk 8:31; 9:31; and 10:32-34). He predicts that his disciples will abandon him (Mk 14:27) and that Peter will deny him (Mk 14:30). He also displays clairvoyant abilities in instructing his disciples how to prepare for his entry into Jerusalem (Mk 11:1-7) and for the Passover (Mk 14:12-16). Jesus is able to discern the future like the prophets of old.¹¹

Jesus’ deeds and words are signs to the reader that he can be counted as a prophet. The people of Jesus’ time are also reported to have regarded him as a prophet (Mk 6:15, 8:28). Moreover, Jesus, in giving an explanation why the people in Nazareth rejected him, said, “Prophets are not without honor, except in their hometown, and among their own kin, and in their own house” (Mk 6:4); Jesus also saw himself as a prophet. Finally and most relevant to this study, the Markan Jesus’ acts in the temple can be interpreted as prophetic because Jesus used the words of the prophets Isaiah (56:7) and Jeremiah (7:11) to shed light on what he did.

Possible interpretations of Jesus’ temple actions

The temple that Jesus supposedly “cleansed,” though existing during what has been designated as the second-temple period, was actually the third temple. Known as the Herodian temple, as it was Herod the Great who rebuilt it on an expanded temple platform beginning in 20-19 BCE, this third temple was truly monumental, containing the sanctuary, courts, gates,

¹⁰See Rudolf Karl Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 108-125.

¹¹The presentation above of Jesus as a prophet is guided by Collins’s own treatment of the topic. See Collins, 44-53.

approaches, porticoes, subsidiary buildings, and even the fortress Antonia.¹² When the whole project was finally finished in 63 CE, it was one of the largest complexes in the ancient world. It is estimated that the sacred precincts extended to an area of 144000 square meters.¹³

As Sanders points out, Jesus' action in the temple could not have stopped all buying and selling for this would have required an army.¹⁴ Some scholars propose that Jesus' followers must have also joined his demonstration, but this is not found in the text. Jesus' temple act would not have been substantial enough to disrupt the daily routine for an extended period of time, or else he would have been arrested right on the spot.¹⁵ Thus, the significance of Jesus' actions in the temple must be based not on what they were immediately able to accomplish but on what they must have stood for. And what did they symbolize?

Was Jesus making a stand for Gentiles? Interpretations that take this direction focus on the words "house of prayer for all nations" (Mk 11:17, from Isa 56:7). To add credence to this reading, scholars situate Jesus' temple act in the Court of the Gentiles, pointing out that the Greek word rendered as "temple" in Mk 11:15-17 is *ιερόν* (temple precincts) and not *ναός* (the temple building itself or the sanctuary). Did Jesus expel the traders to reclaim the space for the Gentiles and give them a place to pray? But the designation "Court of the Gentiles" did not exist during Jesus' or Mark's time.¹⁶ Josephus' *Antiquities*, his *Jewish Wars*, and the *Mishne*

¹²Carol Meyers, "Temple, Jerusalem" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 365.

¹³Meir Ben-Dov, *In the Shadow of the Temple: the Discovery of Ancient Jerusalem*, trans. Ina Friedman (Jerusalem: Harper Collins, 1985), 77.

¹⁴Sanders, 70.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Solomon Zeitlin, "There Was No Court of Gentiles in the Temple Area," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* (July 1965): 88.

Midoth, all of which have detailed descriptions of the Herodian temple, do not mention the “Court of the Gentiles” or refer to the outer courts as such. Even when the designation is used later on in history, it is not meant positively or to afford the Gentiles a special place. The “Court of the Gentiles” has a negative meaning: It is the area beyond which Gentiles cannot go.

The Markan Jesus does exhibit concern for Gentiles. He healed the Syrophenician woman’s daughter, albeit after hesitating at first (Mk 7:24-30). This encounter seems to have opened Jesus to reaching out to the Gentiles. He healed a deaf man in the district of Tyre (Mk 7:31-37) shortly thereafter. The feeding of the four thousand (Mk 8:1-10), especially when compared to the earlier feeding of the five thousand (Mk 6:34-44) and its Jewish-centric details, is read by many commentators as an extension of Jesus’ ministry to all nations. But up to this point, the drama and the tension in Mark have been steadily building up. Opposition to Jesus has been increasing and coming closer to him. There are also those three ominous predictions of his passion in “the Way section” (Mk 8:22-10:52) which serve to warn the reader of impending danger. Jesus’ concern for the Gentiles, as presented in Mark, is limited to Mk 7:24-8:10 – just twenty-four verses. To focus again on the Gentiles at this stage of the story seems out of place. Jesus’ concern for the Gentiles does not seem to merit such a pivotal position in the narrative.

Was Jesus demonstrating against unfair and opportunistic trade practices? Interpretations of the temple incident that see it thus emphasize the words “den of robbers” (Mk 11:17, from Jer 7:11). It is not too difficult to imagine, as some studies suggest, that the sellers and money changers fleeced the pilgrims at the Jerusalem temple and took advantage of them. Those in charge of the temple probably knew this and, beyond tacit approval, also gave

it their support – for a cut of the profits, as we can again easily imagine. While this is plausible, the text does not bear witness to it, and the theme of corruption is not such a major concern in Mark that it would be the focus of as critical a pericope as the temple controversy. Moreover, if Jesus were against any overcharging or even swindling that was happening, why would he drive out not only the sellers but the buyers as well?

Was Jesus purifying the temple from the defilement of all trade, whether honest or not? This would explain the evacuation of *both* the buyers and sellers. It would also explain why Jesus stopped the transport of σκεῦος through the temple. σκεῦος is translated as “anything” in Mk 11:16, but it can also be translated as vessel and what merchants used to hold their money. It can also refer to the money bags of those who used the temple as a bank¹⁷ – as many temples in the ancient world also functioned. But the text does not really focus on commercialism in the temple.

The trade that went on in the temple was actually essential to the cult. Pilgrims, some coming from great distances, could hardly be expected to bring their own animals to be sacrificed. Not only would sheep, oxen, pigeons, turtledoves, and the like be very inconvenient to bring on long trips, but there was also a great possibility that these would be blemished along the way and be rejected by the priests as not fit for sacrifice. The money changers performed an important service as well because they provided pilgrims with the standard Tyrian coinage acceptable for paying the half-shekel temple tax.¹⁸ Jesus’ actions in the temple should therefore be seen not only as against the buyers, sellers, and money changers, but

¹⁷John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 2, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 328.

¹⁸Sanders, 64-65.

against all the daily activities in the temple which the buyers, sellers, and money changers were participating in. But was Jesus against sacrifice and all other temple practices?

This does not seem to be the case because, in Mk 1:44-45, he tells the leper he just healed to go to the temple, show himself to the priests, and offer for his cleansing what Moses prescribed in Lev 14:2-32. It can be argued that seeing Mk 1:40-45 in this light is only a shallow reading. Some manuscripts have Jesus in Mk 1:41 not moved with pity but with anger. The anger could have been at “the Jerusalem priestly establishment and their institutionalized procedures and prescribed offering for the ‘leper’ to be free of the stigma (clean). Since Jesus already made the man clean, his instructions must be intended either as a demonstrative testimony or ‘witness’ against the priest and the costly offerings required by their code.”¹⁹

A better argument for Jesus not being against temple offerings can be seen in his high regard of the widow in Mk 12:41-44. Jesus had just denounced the scribes for devouring the houses of widows in Mk 12:40. Joseph Fitzmyer has compiled a list of what this could have meant:

- a. Scribes accepted payment for legal aid to widows, even though such payment was forbidden.
- b. Scribes cheated widows of what was rightly theirs; as lawyers, they were acting as guardians appointed by a husband’s will to care for the widow’s estate.
- c. Scribes sponged on the hospitality of these women of limited means, like the gluttons and gourmands mentioned in Assumption of Moses 7:6 (“devourers of the goods of the poor, saying that they do so on the basis of their justice”).
- d. Scribes mismanaged the property of widows like Anna who had dedicated themselves to the service of the Temple.
- e. Scribes took large sums of money from credulous old women as a reward for the

¹⁹Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 60 (New Testament).

prolonged prayer which they professed to make on their behalf.
f. Scribes took the houses as pledges for debts which could not be paid.²⁰

As much as Jesus saw the injustice being played out right before him, he did not stop the widow from putting her two small coins into the treasury. Instead, Jesus praised her.

One final piece of evidence that Jesus was not against temple sacrifice is that he and his disciples ate the Passover meal “on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed” (Mk 14:12-16). Even though a lamb is not mentioned at the Last Supper, the Passover meal would not have been complete without it. And the only place in Jerusalem where the lambs could be slaughtered at this time was the temple.

Was Jesus’ symbolizing the destruction of the temple? This is Sanders’s position. He centers on the image of “overturning” tables and seats and links this with Jesus’ prophecy about temple being destroyed in Mk 13:1-ff: “Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down.”²¹ But as Sanders himself notes, one objection to this is that overturning furniture is not an obvious symbol of destruction. C. F. D. Moule points to the broken pot in Jer 19:10 as a better sign. Also, if the meaning of Jesus’ acts can be seen in his prediction of the temple’s destruction, why was this prophecy not reported right after the temple event? Why did Mark wait for two chapters before recounting this? It is the conflation of Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11 (in Mk 11:17) that is put right after Jesus’ acts, and so this passage must be used to interpret what the Markan Jesus meant to do.

²⁰Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X–XXIV: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 28A (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 1318.

²¹Sanders, 70-76.

The possible readings of the temple controversy presented above are not exhaustive of all scholarly positions, but they are representative of what this study calls “minimal” interpretations. They are “minimal” because, while they are based on the text, they limit their views to the temple scene and the episodes proximate to it. As a result, they also prove unsatisfactory. What is needed, especially for a difficult text such as the temple controversy, is a “maximal” interpretation, one that considers the thrusts and themes of the whole Gospel and opens up to a more integrated view.

Towards a maximal interpretation

A maximal interpretation is one that considers one part of the narrative in the larger context of the whole story. It is the position of this study that the “cleansing of the temple” is not merely a cleansing and not only about the temple. The temple is not usually listed in commentaries as a major motif in Mark’s Gospel. In fact, the first mention of the temple only comes in Mk 11:11. It does, from then on, play a prominent part, but to introduce a new theme only in the last third of a narrative does not speak well of a storyteller’s art and skill. The point of the scenes involving the temple must therefore already be found early in the Gospel, perhaps even in the beginning. It must lie in many other parts throughout the Gospel, and it must also be seen when the Gospel is taken as a whole.

This maximal approach can also be applied analogously to the way this study will treat Mark’s allusions to Hebrew Scripture and other texts from the second temple period. This thesis will also examine the Jewish texts echoed in Mark in their wider context. Atomistic exegesis, “which interprets sentences, clauses, phrases, and even single words, independently

of the context or the historical occasion,”²² was a rabbinic practice and is part of the Jewish tradition of *midrash*. Because Christianity’s roots are located in Judaism, it would be logical to assume that the exegetical procedures of the New Testament writers would resemble to some extent those of contemporary Jewish exegeses.²³ Is it valid then to go back to the larger contexts of Jewish texts when they appear? There are also examples of contextual Jewish exegeses; we should not too hastily conclude that the Jews used texts only in one way. David Instone Brewer demonstrates this with a number of examples of contextual Jewish exegeses.²⁴ So how do we know whether a particular use of a Jewish text in Mark is an example of contextual or non-contextual exegesis? How do we know whether to go back to an allusion’s larger context or not? We take a clue from Donald Juel’s approach in *Messiah and the Temple*: If a particular allusion to a Jewish text does not seem to fit well in its new setting, we will examine the original context of the Jewish allusion.²⁵ If going back to the original context of a Jewish allusion sheds more light on its new setting, how can we just ignore what it gives us to ponder? As will be shown, Mark’s use of Jewish texts will always be better understood when these texts are seen in their original contexts. Following Timothy Gray, we will consider Mark’s use of Jewish Scripture as more than just examples of atomistic exegesis but as instances of metalepsis, a literary method of evoking the wider meaning of an earlier text by

²²George Foot Moore, *Judaism in the First Three Centuries of the Christian Era: The Age of the Tannaim*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 248.

²³Richard N. Longenecker, “Who is the Prophet Talking About? Some Reflections on the New Testament’s Use of the Old,” *Themelios* (October and November 1987): 7.

²⁴See David Instone Brewer, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis Before 70 CE* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992).

²⁵See this approach at work in Donald Juel, *Messiah and Temple: The Trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Missoula, Mont.: Society of Biblical Literature, 1977), 133.

striking a resonance through a brief citation.²⁶ Thus, while only a phrase is quoted, we will also look into the context of the verse where it originally appears.

The kingdom of God

We begin our maximal interpretation by going back to what many exegetes have pointed to as the “thesis statement” of Mark’s Gospel: “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near (or is at hand); repent, and believe in the good news” (Mk 1:15).

The words above, which the Markan Jesus spoke at the start of his ministry, situate him squarely in an eschatological context.²⁷ “Eschatology” literally means words or concepts about the last or final things, but Jewish eschatology is not about the end of the world. That would make no sense in the Jewish worldview,²⁸ for then how would God’s promises be fulfilled?

Jewish eschatology is centered on the faithfulness of God to his covenant with Israel. The basis of this covenant is the set of promises given to the patriarchs (“I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing” Gen 12:2; see also Gen 15, 17 and 22). This set of promises was initially fulfilled with the exodus (Ex 2:24-ff), ratified at Sinai (Ex 19-24),²⁹ found blossoming with David and the blessing given to his house (2 Sam 7), challenged in exile in Babylon, and seemingly restored upon the return of God’s people to Jerusalem. But the Jews during Jesus’ time would have been in a dilemma: If God had made a covenant with them, why were they in their current

²⁶Timothy C. Gray, *The Temple in the Gospel of Mark: A Study in its Narrative Role* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 5.

²⁷Donahue and Harrington, 37.

²⁸N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 1 (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1992), 285.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 260-261.

state? It had been many years since they were released from Babylon, but though they were back in their land, they were still in an exile of oppression under foreign overlords. Still, Israel held on to hope. Jewish eschatology looks to the future. If there is anything final in Jewish eschatology, it is a final future, the advent of an age that will last and never be supplanted.

N. T. Wright partly summarizes the Jewish worldview seen in second-temple literature as follows:

- a. Israel's God is indeed going to fulfil his covenant with his chosen people. Hope is never abandoned (Dan. 9:16; Neh. 9:8; Joel 2:15-32; Ps. Sol. 9; Bar. 5:9; etc.).
- b. This needs a re-establishment of the divinely intended order in all of the world (Isa. 40-55; Dan. 7; Tob. 13-14, etc.).³⁰

The kingdom of God is one way of talking about the re-establishment of the divine order that fulfils the covenant. Reflection on eschatology in the New Testament has privileged the image of kingdom of God (or kingdom of Heaven, a circumlocution in the Gospel of Matthew), and validly so because this expression is mentioned 122 times, with ninety-nine of those occurrences in the synoptic Gospels. In Mark alone, there are fourteen references to the kingdom of God.

The kingdom of God should not be understood as primarily spatial, territorial, or political. Going back to the Greek βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, we note that βασιλεία is more active and dynamic than the static “kingdom.” βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ refers more to the “reigning” or “living rule” of God as well as the conditions for his reign.

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the good news” is a programmatic statement. It sets Jesus’ mission for the rest of the Gospel. As

³⁰Ibid., 271.

many scholars have said, *everything* that Jesus does and says is a proclamation that the kingdom of God has come near. If this is so, then Jesus' demonstration in the temple must also be read as a prophetic act preaching the kingdom of God.

The prophetic acts mentioned at the beginning of this chapter all have connections with the message they were trying to convey: Walking naked is a sign of being led away as poor and defeated captives; a broken jug symbolizes a city destroyed; hair scattered and burned signify a people dispersed and reduced to nothing. How can driving out buyers and sellers, overturning tables and chairs, and preventing the transport of vessels signify the coming of a kingdom?

A different image

The kingdom of God is a privileged way of talking about eschatology, but it is only one way of talking about it. In all the times the kingdom of God is discussed and described in the Gospels, it is never really precisely defined. This may be because the kingdom of God is elusive, or perhaps, it is the hope, the promise, and the mystery that the kingdom of God is trying to capture that is even more elusive: eschatology.

To better connect the temple event to eschatology, this study proposes a different focal image. We do not have to look far for an alternative metaphor. Reading Mark's "thesis statement" as an instance of synonymous parallelism, a common device in poetic Hebrew texts, we already have another way of stating that the kingdom of God is at hand: "The time is fulfilled." How "time," "season," "age," "era," or *καιρὸς* can be a better way of understanding Jesus' temple act will be developed below.

Before anything else though, it must be emphasized that this study is not proposing to replace “kingdom of God.” It is pushing another image to be considered alongside it. Earlier we saw how Mark presents many different images of Jesus, some overlapping with others, but with no single image capturing Jesus perfectly. Similarly, we have many different images of eschatology: new creation, covenant fulfilment, blessings given, deliverance, liberation, new exodus, restoration, the day of the Lord, kingdom of God, and so on. All these images approximate but never fully encapsulate what is hoped for in eschatology. This is because eschatology refers to a time in the future when the course of history will be changed – no one knows exactly when or precisely how – to such an extent that there is an entirely new state of reality about which the only thing certain is that it is new.³¹ Perhaps proposing a different image will remind us again that the kingdom of God is not static. Perhaps proposing a different image will allow us to recover some of the dynamism the metaphor of the kingdom of God has lost.

Pastorally, the theme of time has strong advantages over the metaphor of the kingdom of God. Though kingdom or βασιλεία is supposed to be a dynamic concept, our present political systems have rendered it antiquated. Kings and queens are relics of the past. What may be better able to communicate today is the image of time. We speak of “Generation X,” “Generation Why,” the “Millennials,” and so on. To these groups, we can proclaim a Jesus who has established a new and everlasting generation, a time that will last forever.

³¹David L. Petersen, “Eschatology,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 575.

The aspect of time in Mark

Is time a valid theme with which to interpret and integrate Mark? καιρὸς is mentioned only in Mk 1:15, 11:13, and 13:33, but its second occurrence, when Mark comments that it was not the season or καιρὸς for figs, is very relevant in our discussion of the temple controversy (see below).

We are alerted to the importance of the aspect of time in Mk 1:1: “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” In this study, we will take the position that “beginning” here does not just refer to the witness of John the Baptist (Mk 1:2-8) or only to the prologue of Mark (Mk 1:1-13 or, as some outlines have it, Mk 1:1-15). We will take “beginning” here in conjunction with understanding good news, gospel, or εὐαγγέλιον in the same way that Paul, the earliest Christian writer in the New Testament, proclaims it in Rom 1:3-4: “the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.” For Paul, more often than not, the content of the good news is the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus Christ. As Brendan Byrne explains:

If, for Paul – and presumably other Christian writers and preachers before Mark – the core content of “the Gospel” was the good news about God’s raising of Jesus and the establishment of his messianic reign through the Spirit (Rom 1:3-4), what Mark could be saying, then, [with “The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God”] at the start of his work is: “You believe the basic good news about Jesus the Crucified One: how God raised him from the dead and revealed him to be the Messiah and Son of God. Now I am going to tell you how Jesus anticipated his postresurrection messianic reign in his teaching and activity up to and including his death on the cross. In other words, I am going to tell you how it all *began*.³²

³²Brendan Byrne, *A Costly Freedom: A Theological Reading of Mark’s Gospel* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2008), 24.

The whole of Mark therefore can be seen as a process of inauguration, the establishment of a new period. To this, we can add R. Alan Culpepper's insight on beginnings: "To make a beginning is to divide time, to place a marker that says one era has ended and another one has begun."³³

"Gospel" or "good news" or εὐαγγέλιον also connotes a new age. In the Greek-speaking world of Mark, εὐαγγέλιον (or εὐαγγέλια, the plural form in which it more commonly appears) is used to in formal announcements of marriage, anniversaries, and in the proclamation of the accession or birth of rulers and emperors. An inscription from Priene in Asia Minor dating back to 9 B.C.E. states:

...the birthday of the god (Caesar Augustus) has been for the whole world the beginning of the gospel (εὐαγγέλια); concerning him, therefore, let all reckon a new era beginning from the date of his birth.³⁴

Seeing Jesus as a prophet also builds up eschatological expectations and indicates the beginning of a new age. For Israel, prophecy declined and then ceased sometime after the Babylonian exile. But in the second temple period, the notion that prophecy was a thing of the past somehow combined with the expectation that the end of the present tribulation and the coming redemption would be accompanied by the return of prophets.³⁵

³³R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark*, Smith & Helwys Bible Commentary, vol. 20 (Macon, Georgia: Smith & Helwys Publishing, Inc., 2007), 64.

³⁴See Byrne, 6.

³⁵Collins, 44.

“Kingdom of God” may outnumber references to *καιρός* by a large margin, but another expression related to time occurs almost three times more frequently than *βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ* in the Gospel according to Mark: *εὐθύς*, which appears forty-one times. Translated most of the time as “immediately,” *εὐθύς* “lends the sense of everything proceeding at breathless haste – the unstoppable unfolding of a divine project.”³⁶ Even *βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ* has a time aspect: the kingdom of God is *when* God rules. This ties in quite neatly with the concept of good news in Isa 52:7: “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’” What is good news is when God reigns. Benedict XVI asserts that the kingdom of God is an “event” unfolding in history in a new way beginning with Jesus’ proclamation of the good news. Jesus’ message is that “God is acting *now* [emphasis added] – this is the hour when God is showing himself in history as its Lord, as the Living God, in a way that goes beyond anything seen before.”³⁷

The aspect of time is also very appropriate for discussing the temple controversy because, as will be shown, the Old Testament texts alluded to in connection with Jesus’ temple demonstration are about the coming day of the Lord and the day of judgment.

The old age and the new

Eschatology includes a duality between the present time and the time to come. The new age signals the end of the old, and this is one way of seeing Jesus’ ministry – as a sign that the final future has come.

³⁶Ibid., 30.

³⁷Joseph Ratzinger, *Jesus of Nazareth: From the Baptism in the Jordan to the Transfiguration* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2008), 56.

Jesus' first miracle in Mark is the cure of the demoniac (Mk 1:21-28). This is significant because with this act, Jesus shows that the age of captivity to demons has ended. Eschatology involves the cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil. With his exorcisms (e.g., Mk 5:1-20; 7:24-30; and 9:14-29) – and it is in Mark that Jesus performs the most exorcisms – he communicates that God's victory is at hand; the age of fulfilment has come.

A similar message is found in the cure of Simon's mother-in-law (Mk 1:29-31), the many sick in Capernaum (Mk 1:32-34), the woman with a hemorrhage (5:25-34), and Jairus's daughter: The time of captivity to affliction – and even death – is over; a new time is beginning.

When Jesus heals the paralytic (Mk 2:1-12) and the man with a withered hand (Mk 3:1-6), when he opens the ears and removes the speech impediment of the deaf and dumb man (Mk 7:31-37), when he restores the sight of blind man of Bethsaida (Mk 8:22-26) and Bartimaeus (Mk 10:46-52), Jesus fulfils the Isaian prophecy of the return of the redeemed and the time of their restoration:

Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees...
Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy (Isa 35:3,5-6).

When Jesus touches and cleanses the leper (Mk 1:40-45), eats with sinners and tax collectors (2:13-17), and engages in debates about purity laws (Mk 7:1-23), he signals the end of the old age and the old division between being clean and unclean. When he heals on the

Sabbath (Mk 3:1-6) and teaches that “the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath” (Mk 2:23-28) and challenges Jewish tradition (Mk 7:8-13), he proclaims the end of a particular way of interpreting the Torah. When he redefines what family means (Mk 3:31-35), he marks the beginning of something new. And when he forgives (Mk 2:1-12), he says that time of slavery to sin is over.

Jesus also ends the old understanding of what the Messiah is in his predictions of his passion (Mk 8:31; 9:31; and 10:32-34) and shows his disciples, in the verses immediately following, a new way of greatness in the new age of the kingdom (Mk 8:34-38; 9:33-37; 10:35-45).

The temple

All the words and deeds listed above bring us to the point of the narrative when Jesus is about to enter Jerusalem and the temple. Are not the events and signs above already sufficient in proclaiming the close of the old age and the opening of the new? What does the incident in the temple add? Eschatological thought believes that God will act *definitively* to end the time of the old and begin the prophesied new era. For the Jews, there is no more dramatic place to stage a definitive demonstration than the temple.

The temple was at the heart of every aspect of Jewish life. Its importance cannot be overestimated. Shmuel Safrai writes:

In the eyes of the people, it constituted primarily the divine dwelling-place of the God of Israel which set them apart from other nations... the offering of sacrifices and the ritual cleansing involved atoned for the individual transgressions and served as a framework for his spiritual elevation and purification... The temple, its vessels and even the high priest's vestments were depicted as representing the entire universe and

the heavenly hosts... With the destruction of the temple, the image of the universe was rendered defective.³⁸

The temple was at the religious, national, political, and even economic core of Israel. It was a synecdoche for what Jews held and valued as a people. Thus, it became the focal point of many controversies during the second temple period.³⁹ And when Jesus held his demonstration in the temple, it must have been considered an attack on the whole network of symbols that identified the Jews, an attack on the core of Jewish belief. Jesus, like the prophet in Jeremiah 7, was challenging what Jews thought would save them (see below). No wonder then that the Jewish leaders conspired to put him to death after the temple incident.⁴⁰

We are now ready to deal with the texts directly connected to the temple controversy.

The entry into Jerusalem (Mk 11:1-10)

Jesus' entry into Jerusalem must be part of our treatment of the temple event, in the first place, because of the temporal proximity of the entry to the temple demonstration. The close relationship between Jerusalem and the temple can also be seen in the text which strings together the two: "Then he entered Jerusalem and went into the temple..." (Mk 11:11); "Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple..." (Mk 11:15); and "Again they came to Jerusalem. As he was walking in the temple... (Mk 11:27)."

³⁸Shmuel Safrai, "The Temple" in *The Jewish People in the First Century: Historical Geography, Political History, Social, Cultural, and Religious Life and Institutions*, *Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum*, vol. 2, edited by S. Safrai and M. Stern in cooperation with D. Flusser and W. C. van Unnik (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976): 904-906.

³⁹Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 225.

⁴⁰The Sabbath can also be considered a synecdoche for all the commands and statutes of God. It is noteworthy that after Jesus violated the Sabbath (Mk 3:1-5), "the Pharisees went out and immediately conspired with the Herodians against him, how to destroy him" (Mk 3:6).

Wright describes Jerusalem and the temple:

When we study the city-plan of ancient Jerusalem, the significance of the temple stands out at once, since it occupies a phenomenally large proportion (about 25%) of the entire city. Jerusalem was not, like Corinth for example, a large city with lots of little temples dotted here and there. It was not so much a city with a temple in it; more like a temple with a small city round it.⁴¹

Jerusalem is a metonymy for the temple and vice versa. Psalm 78:68-69 tells of how God chose Mount Zion for his sanctuary, and Zion later came to refer to Jerusalem, the temple-city. Lam 2:6-8 uses “Fair Zion” and “Jerusalem” interchangeably.⁴² The main point of what happens as Jesus enters Jerusalem can be projected on to the main point of what happens when Jesus clears the temple precincts.

Part of the oracle in Zech 9 prophesies:

Rejoice greatly, O daughter Zion!
Shout aloud, O daughter Jerusalem!
Lo, your king comes to you;
triumphant and victorious is he,
humble and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey (Zech 9:9).

The allusion to Zech 9:9 is more explicit in Matthew’s account of the entry into Jerusalem, but it is also found in Mark’s, as seen when Jesus comes riding on a colt (Mk 11:7) and the people shout aloud (Mk 11:9).

Zech 9:9-17 paints the image of the coming ruler of Israel. It is replete with eschatological hope as it looks forward to “that day” (Zech 9:16) when the Lord *will* save them

⁴¹Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 225.

⁴²See Jon D. Levenson, “Zion Traditions” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 6, 1098. In a further development of the metonymy between the temple and Jerusalem, Zion also was later used to refer to the people of Israel.

(again Zech 9:16), when the Lord *will* appear over them and the Lord God *will* sound the trumpet (Zech 9:14), when the Lord of hosts *will* protect them (Zech 9:15). “That day” is a shortened reference to “the day of the Lord.” All of this should remind us of Mark’s programmatic statement, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand.”

The people shout “Hosanna,” which can be translated as “Save *now!*” The aspect of time is again present as Jesus is praised as ὁ ἐρχόμενος, the one who comes or the one coming in the name of the Lord (Mk 11:9). Mark has pointed to Jesus before in the same manner. John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus and spoke of him as the one more powerful who is coming (Mk 1:7). In the entry into Jerusalem, the one who is coming is announced as having finally come.

The crowds are correct in their proclamation in Mk 11:9: “Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord” (from Ps 118:26). Jesus is the one who is coming, and he comes in the name of the Lord. But they also show their misunderstanding of Jesus in Mk 11:10: “Blessed is the coming kingdom of our ancestor David!” Jesus’ message is all about the kingdom of God, not the kingdom of David, which has political and nationalistic ring to it.⁴³

The first visit to the temple (Mk 11:11)

The first part of Mal 3:1, “See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me,” has already been fulfilled in Mark with John the Baptist’s ministry. Jesus’ first visit to the temple accomplishes the second part, “. . .and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple.” Mal 3:1-7 is yet another passage that has an eschatological context. It is again about the day of coming. But for Malachi, this is not a day of glory. Amos, the first prophet to

⁴³Gray, 21.

announce “the day of the Lord,” warned that this would not be a day of light but darkness for Israel (Am 5:18). Similarly, in Malachi 3, the “day” is a day of judgment: “But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap... Then I will draw near to you for judgment...” (Mal 3:2,5).

What Jesus does when he “suddenly comes to his temple” may seem anti-climactic at first. After the heightening tension in the Way section and the build-up in the entry into Jerusalem, Jesus enters the temple and just looks around. Some scholars say that Mark puts this pause here so that he can insert the cursing of the fig tree (which is the next scene) and have one of his trademark intercalations. Some guess that Jesus needed to look around the temple precincts so that he can plan his demonstration the next day. Some think that to look around was all Jesus could do because, as the text says, it was already late. Perhaps the merchants and the crowds had already gone home. But consider more deeply Jesus’ actions: He looks around at everything – it is what a judge would do. The day of the Lord is a day of judgment. And the judgment will not be all blessing and light. Quite poetically, it is already [too] late (Mk 11:11).

The fig tree cursed (Mk 11:12-14)

The judgment glimpsed in Jesus’ actions the day before now becomes clearer in the scene with the fig tree. First of all, the fig tree figures in the prophetic books often in passages with eschatological import. In Micah 4, when the mountain of the Lord’s house is established as the highest of mountains in the days to come (v. 1), all shall “sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees” (v. 4). In Zechariah 3, when the Lord brings his servant, the Branch, and removes the guilt of the land (vv. 8-9), the people shall invite each other to come and sit

under the vine and fig tree (v. 10). The blossoming of the fig tree and its being found with fruit is depicted when God visits his people with blessing (see Deut 8:7-8; 1 Kgs 4:24-25; and 1 Macc 14:12). But the withering of the fig tree and its lack of fruit is portrayed when God comes in judgment (see Jer 8:13; Hos 2:12; and Isa 34:4). In Amos 8:1-3, the link between the fig tree and God's judgment is presented through a pun: The prophet is shown a basket of summer fruit (which were dried figs) – קַיִטִים (qayits), which God uses to make Amos say קֵץ (qets) – the end (of the people Israel).⁴⁴

It has been noted by many exegetes that when Mark intercalates the puzzling incident involving the fig tree and the controversial acts done in the temple, as with his other intercalations (see for example, Mk 5:21-43: the story of Jairus' daughter and the woman with a hemorrhage; and Mk 14:53-72: Peter following Jesus to the courtyard – Jesus before the Sanhedrin – Peter denying Jesus), the two stories are supposed to be mutually interpretative. The intercalation of the fig tree and the temple scenes is remarkable because we actually have here a “double sandwich”⁴⁵ – Jesus visits the temple for the first time (Mk 11:11); he curses the fig tree (Mk 11:12-14); Jesus goes to the temple again (Mk 11:15-19); the fig tree is seen to have withered (Mk 11:20-25). This makes the relationship between the fig tree and the temple scenes doubly stronger.

In Mk 11:12-13, Jesus, hungry, goes to a fig tree in leaf but finds nothing on it. In Mic 7:1, in the context of judgment (see Mic 6:9-16), God hungers for first-ripe figs and finds none. Just as the fig tree in leaf (Mk 11:12) shows signs of life but is actually fruitless, so is

⁴⁴William R. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree: A Redaction-Critical Analysis of the Cursing of the Fig-Tree Pericope in Mark's Gospel and its Relation to the Cleansing of the Temple Tradition* (Sheffield, Eng.: JSOT Press, 1980), 134-135.

⁴⁵Byrne, 178.

the temple. It is bustling with life and activity, but in truth, produces no fruit.⁴⁶ Thus it will be judged. “May no one ever eat of your fruit again,” Jesus says to the fig tree (Mk 11:14). A fruit tree without fruit is as good as dead; a temple that produces no fruit is as good as ended.

The Markan comment, “It was not the season (καρπός) for figs” (Mk 11:13), may make Jesus look foolish – why would he be looking for figs when there really was not supposed to be any? But the irrationality of the act should be a signal for us: “It was not the season for figs” must be read not as an agricultural statement but as a theological one. First, καρπός should again remind us of the theme of time that is prominent in Mark’s Gospel (explicitly in Mk 1:15: “This is the καρπός...”). Our brief foray into biblical texts concerning figs showed us that a tree ripe for harvest means eschatological glory and a bare tree is a sign of the season of judgment.⁴⁷ The Markan comment in v. 13 prepares us for what will happen in the temple.

The demonstration in the temple (Mk 11:15-17)

When Jesus drives out those buying and selling in the temple (Mk 11:15), the verb ἐκβάλλειν is the same word that is employed when he expels demons (see Mk. 1:34, 43; 3:15; 9:38 as examples). As noted before, exorcisms are a sign of the end of the old age of captivity and the in-breaking of the new. The clearing of the temple precincts by the expulsion of the buyers and sellers and the overturning of the money changers’ tables and the dove sellers’ seats (Mk 11:15-16) can be seen as a fulfilment of Zech 14:21, “And there shall no longer be traders in the house of the Lord of hosts on that day,” one description of what will happen on the day of the Lord.

⁴⁶Kirk, 521.

⁴⁷Ibid.

How can we understand “And he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple” (Mk 11:16)? According to the *Mishnah*, “one should not enter the temple mount with his walking stick, his shoes, his money bag, or with dust on his feet. And one should not use [the temple mount] for a shortcut” (*Berakhot* 9:5). Is Jesus just trying to preserve the sacredness of the temple complex? Is this act about purifying the temple? If we relate this idea to the fig tree episode, to what happened in the previous scene, and to the withering that will be observed in the next, preservation of sacredness and purification does not fit. The cursing and drying up of the fig tree points to an end. How can we reconcile what happened to the fig tree with Jesus’ temple actions?

As we did with Jesus’ first visit to the temple, let us again imagine what Jesus enacted: He throws out those buying and selling; he interrupts those changing coins and peddling doves; he prevents anyone carrying anything to pass through. In effect, in the area Jesus is able to cover, all activity ceases. The temple (represented by the space Jesus occupies) is at a standstill. The way the New Revised Standard Version translates the astonished way the people reacted strengthens the image we have constructed – they are “spellbound” (Mk 11:18).

This is where we see the advantage of focusing our interpretation on the aspect of *καρπός* and not on the image of kingdom: Things ground to a halt in the temple. It is as if time stops. And this is the meaning of Jesus’ temple demonstration: The age of the temple is judged to be ended.

Echoes of Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11

Jesus in Mk 11:17 then teaches, “Is it not written, ‘My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations (Isa 56:7)?’ But you have made it a den of robbers (Jer 7:11).”⁴⁸ How do these two biblical allusions interpret what Jesus has just done? Following the methodology which we have described previously, we will now consider the larger context of these allusions.

Atomistic exegesis can mislead us into thinking that the point of “house of prayer for all nations” is the concern for the Gentiles. But Isa 56:7 is part of an eschatological vision of God’s future intervention to save Israel. It is about a salvation about to come, a justice about to be revealed (Isa 56:1). A future house of prayer for all who observe what is right, who do what is pleasing to God (vv. 1, 4, 7), is promised not only to Israel but to foreigners, eunuchs and others (see v. 3-4, 6, and 8).⁴⁹ Thus, two signs of the time of fulfilment are a new temple and the gathering of Israel and the Gentiles.

It should be reiterated that in Jesus’ time, though the Babylonian exile was over, “the glorious message of the prophets remained unfulfilled. Israel still remained in thrall to foreigners.”⁵⁰ The temple had been rebuilt twice – by Zerubbabel and, in a much grander

⁴⁸In previous teaching scenes in Mark, what Jesus says is not reported. But his words are usually accompanied by great deeds (for example, see Mk 1:21-27, when he teaches and then cures the demoniac; Mk 1:39, when he preaches and expels demons; Mk 2:1-12, when he interrupts his teaching to heal the paralytic; and so on). Jesus’ teaches not only with his words but with his deeds. And when a teaching is reported that is close to a mighty deed, we must see it as the interpretation of that deed.

⁴⁹Some scholars place too much emphasis on the Sabbath observance of the eunuchs and foreigners (vv. 4,6), but the Sabbath, as mentioned before in another footnote, can just be a synecdoche for all the commands and statutes of the Lord. This can be seen when vv. 4 and 6 are read as examples of synonymous parallelism.

⁵⁰Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 269.

fashion, Herod the Great. But there was still an expectation of a future temple other than what they had, and in this future temple peoples from all nations would flock.

This two-fold expectation finds resonance in other texts from the second-temple period. The last chapter of the Book of Tobit, dated by most scholars in the second century B.C.E., presupposes the existence of Zerubbabel's rebuilt temple but still says:

But God will again have mercy on them, and God will bring them back into the land of Israel; and they will rebuild the temple of God, but not like the first one until the period when the times of fulfilment shall come. After this they all will return from their exile and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendor; and in it the temple of God will be rebuilt, just as the prophets of Israel have said concerning it. Then the nations in the whole world will all be converted and worship God in truth... All the Israelites who are saved in those days and are truly mindful of God will be gathered together; they will go to Jerusalem and live in safety forever in the land of Abraham, and it will be given over to them. Those who sincerely love God will rejoice, but those who commit sin and injustice will vanish from all the earth (Tob 14:5-7).

This is the real post-exilic restoration of which the previous one (beginning in 538 B.C.E.) was simply a foretaste.⁵¹

Another example is found in the visions in 1 Enoch, written during the rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175-164 B.C.E.):

I saw till the Lord of the sheep brought a new house greater and loftier than that first, and set it up in the place of the first which had been folded up: all its pillars were new, and its ornaments were new and larger than those of the first, the old one which he had taken away (1 Enoch 90:29).⁵²

⁵¹Ibid., 270.

⁵²*Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*, vol. 2, ed. Robert Henry Charles (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2004).

If one continues reading 1 Enoch 90 through verse 39, we will see all people being drawn to this “new house” and a new humanity is formed.

“Jesus’ citation of Isa 56:7 should not be read simply as a statement about a desired state of affairs that Jesus did not find when he entered the temple precincts.”⁵³ Yes, there might have been activities there that were, to refer to Isaiah 56, “not right” and “not pleasing to God,” but these are not the point of the temple event. The temple scene should have emphasized these activities and what was wrong with them, if that were the case. Instead, we are only left to conjecture about them. But what is emphasized is eschatology. Jesus stops temple activities, symbolizing that he is stopping temple time, and ends the era of this temple to make way for the future. The “shall” in Isa 56:7 is significant. Herod’s temple, no matter how grandiose it was, did not fill the role of God’s promised dwelling place with his people. Something else shall.

Culpepper explains what Gray calls metalepsis in this way:

In order to grasp the full significance of the quotation, one must remember that in the first century, there were no chapter and verse divisions in the Hebrew Scriptures, and that quotation marks, footnotes, and cross references were not yet in use. Therefore, brief quotations of key phrases were often used to evoke the larger context of a familiar passage of Scripture.⁵⁴

What does the brief quotation of “house of prayer for all nations” evoke? It should remind the reader of a future temple that will fulfil God’s covenant – though as we all find out later, not in the way Jews expected.

⁵³Kirk, 516.

⁵⁴Culpepper, 379.

Atomistic exegesis of Jer 7:11 can mislead us into thinking that the point of “den of robbers” is how Jewish leaders have robbed the people in the various ways illustrated before. We can get lost looking for the best way to translate ληστῶν. After all, it was used by Jesus when he was arrested and he asked in Mk 14:48, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit (ληστήν)?” Two revolutionaries (the New American Bible’s translation of ληστιάς) or insurrectionists were also crucified with Jesus (Mk 15:27).

Looking more closely at the text of Mk 11:17, we see a parallelism between “house of prayer” and “den of thieves” – more pointedly, the parallelism is between “house” and “den.”⁵⁵ The focus therefore should not be on “prayer” or “robbers” but on the temple.

In Jer 7:1-15 the focal image is clear in the use of “the Lord’s house;” “gate / gates;” “dwell” (three occurrences); “place” (five occurrences); “house, which is called by my name” (three occurrences); den of robbers; and “This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord.” The people of Judah (not just their leaders) have made the temple a place where they can hide after committing abominations. They think that they will be safe there; they have made it something of an idol or a magical charm. Now comes the judgment. God says to the people of Judah, “I will do to the house that is called by my name, in which you trust, and to the place that I gave to you and to your ancestors, just what I did to Shiloh” (Jer 7:14).

What should the brief quotation of “den of robbers” evoke? It should remind us of the end of the first temple. Jesus, too, in Mk 11:15-17, mirroring the judgment on the fruitless fig tree, pronounces judgment on the temple. The chief priests and the scribes hear it as the

⁵⁵This stands out more when “for all nations” is dropped. Is this why Matthew and Luke, the acknowledged more elegant writers, discard this even if they, too, show Jesus as having concern for the Gentiles?

disciples heard the curse on the fig tree. Jesus' demonstration, to say it again, has symbolized the temple's end.

In summary, Mk 11:17 brings together two quotes from the Prophets that interpret Jesus' temple actions in this way: "The time of this temple has ended. There is a future temple in our horizon."

We have been focusing on the temple in the last few paragraphs, and so we must again remind ourselves that what is at stake here is not just the temple. N. T. Wright compares Jesus' action in the temple to the burning of a flag.⁵⁶ When someone burns a flag, he or she is not just incinerating a piece of cloth but, symbolically, he or she sets fire to a land, a people, a government, sovereignty, and all the other narratives implied in the flag. Jesus passed judgment not just on the temple but on all the other implied narratives held by the chief priests, the scribes, and the Pharisees which were connected to the temple. Again, no wonder the Jewish leaders wanted him killed.

The fig tree withered (Mk 11:20-26)

Even Jeremiah, the well-known prophet of doom, has a book of consolation. Ezekiel prophesies the destruction of the temple. But once the temple is destroyed, Ezekiel's message becomes one of promise that the temple will be rebuilt and that God's people would return to Jerusalem. Jesus has just prophetically ended the time of the temple. Will he also point to a new beginning? This is what we see when Jesus and the disciples revisit the fig tree.

First, they see that the fig tree is "withered to its roots," utterly ended, just like the temple. Another reminder of what happened in the temple is in Mk 11:23: "Truly I tell you, if

⁵⁶Tom Wright, *The Original Jesus: The Life and Vision of a Revolutionary* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 62.

you say to this mountain, ‘Be taken up and thrown into the sea,’ and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you.” The mountain can be any proverbial mountain, but considering that Jesus and the disciples were walking to Jerusalem and that Jesus uses the demonstrative pronoun “this” (τούτῳ), it is possible that Jesus was pointing to the temple mount in Jerusalem. And Jesus, with his prophetic act of judgment the previous day, has symbolically “taken up” the temple mount and “thrown” it into the chaos of the sea.

In Wisdom literature, different sayings and proverbs can be grouped together without logical development and with only the verbal association as the connection. Is this also true for the seemingly disparate and loosely related exhortations about faith, prayer, and forgiveness in Mk 11:22-25? Kirk reminds us of the integral part of Isa 56:7 so far in the prophecy of the temple’s end.⁵⁷ What eschatological temple will replace the existing one? What will be the new house of prayer for all peoples? It is the position of this thesis that the community of disciples will be the new temple. The community of disciples is what unites Mk 11:22-25.

One proof of this is that, in this pericope, Peter acts as a representative of the disciples. Note that while it is Peter who expresses, “Rabbi, look! The fig tree that you cursed has withered” (Mk 11:21), Jesus directs his response to all (Mk 11:22). Next, Jesus’ teaching the disciples to “have faith” and stressing the need for prayer should remind us of one other time Jesus emphasized faith and prayer – during the healing of the boy with a demon in Mk 9:14-29. The themes here are also faith and belief (“Everything is possible to one who has faith” (Mk 9:23)) and prayer (“This kind can only come out through prayer” (Mk 9:29)). Liberation from demons, as seen earlier, is a sign of the inbreaking time of fulfilment. If the disciples

⁵⁷Kirk, 524.

want to be a part of this dynamic, they must have faith and pray. In the same way, if the disciples want to be part of the new temple, they must also have faith and pray. This argument, though, will only be as strong as the link between the image of the temple and the community of the disciples. Thus, it is important that we establish the withered fig tree as symbolic of the temple's end and "this" mountain (referring to the temple mount) being uprooted and thrown into the sea as representative of the temple's fate. The pericope about the withered fig tree ends with Jesus saying to the disciples, "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." "Stand praying" and "forgive" should put the disciples opposite the temple. Does not the temple stand as a house of prayer? Is not the temple the place to offer sacrifice for atonement and forgiveness? The community of disciples are now the new locus of these activities. As long as they keep on praying and forgiving, they are the new temple.

That the disciples should be given such importance should not surprise us. Jesus' first act after his baptism, after he proclaims the summary of his message ("This is the time of fulfilment. The kingdom of God is at hand...") is to call the first disciples. Mk 1:14-8:30, in the outline of Mark proposed by many exegetes, is identified as the section when Jesus establishes the stage for his ministry. It is when he reveals in word and deed what his mission is all about. This section can be subdivided into three cycles (1:14-3:6; 3:7-6:6a; 6:6b-8:30) which follow a pattern of: summary, a scene involving the disciples, mighty words and or deeds, and rejection. The importance of the disciples in every cycle is already apparent, but it will be further stressed in Mk 8:31-10:52, the second major section of Mark, also known as "the Way." This part can be read as Jesus forming the community gathered around him,

molding them into a model of discipleship patterned after Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection (which he predicts three times here).

That Jesus seems to be creating something new with the disciples should also not surprise because from the very beginning of Mark, the theme of new creation has been present. Echoes of Genesis can be heard in Mark 1 with the mention of "beginning" (which is also one of the first words of Genesis); God's Spirit (which hovered over the waters before creation); and Jesus among wild beasts (a possible allusion to the garden).

Jesus' cursing of the fig tree and his demonstration in the temple are acts of judgment. Judgment in the Old Testament is not just the promulgation of a decree or decision. It is better understood as an act of intervention and rectification.⁵⁸ On the present state of the temple, Israel, and the world, God, through Jesus, has pronounced his judgment. The old time has ended. God's intervention and rectification is to signal the new era borne now by the new temple, the community of disciples, and another figure.

Jesus is also the New Temple

The new house of prayer for all peoples is also Jesus. A clue that leads us to this assertion is how Jesus concludes the parable of the tenants. It is quite clear that Jesus is the son of the vineyard owner whom the tenants seize and kill. But Jesus suddenly switches metaphors at the end of the parable. He shifts from agricultural to temple imagery: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is amazing in our eyes." Ironically, this passage comes also from Ps 118 (see vv. 22-23), which the crowds used to welcome Jesus into Jerusalem.

⁵⁸Richard J. Clifford, "The Prophets," (class lecture, Boston College School of Theology and Ministry, Boston, MA, April 2, 2013).

Another clue is “I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands” in Mk 14:58. This is easily applied to Jesus and his resurrection. But why is this presented in Mark’s account of Jesus’ trial in front of the Sanhedrin as false testimony about which the lying witnesses cannot agree (Mk 14:57, 59)? Perhaps what is false about it is that Jesus is not the one who will destroy the temple but God, and it is God who will vindicate the New Temple by raising him up on the third day. Or maybe this is an example of Markan irony. While the false witnesses’ intent is to lie about Jesus, resulting in inconsistent testimonies, they actually end up saying the truth.

Still another clue that Jesus is the New Temple lies in the close parallelism between the preparation for the entry into Jerusalem and the preparation for the Passover. In both sequences, two disciples are sent ahead, and they find someone who can help them with what Jesus needs. Gray summarizes the strong verbal resonances between Mk 11:1-11 and Mk 14:12-17 in the chart⁵⁹ reproduced below:

	Mark 11		Mark 14
vv. 1c-2a	ἀποστέλλει δύο τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς	v. 13a	ἀποστέλλει δύο τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς
v. 2a	ὑπάγετε εἰς τὴν κώμην	v. 13a	ὑπάγετε εἰς τὴν πόλιν
v. 3b	εἶπατε· ὁ κύριος	v. 14b	εἶπατε τῷ οἰκοδεσπότῃ ὅτι ὁ διδάσκαλος
v. 4a	καὶ εὔρον	v. 16b	καὶ εὔρον
v. 11b	ὁψίας ἤδη οὔσης τῆς ὥρας, ἐξῆλθεν εἰς Βηθανίαν μετὰ τῶν δώδεκα	v. 17	Καὶ ὁψίας γενομένης ἔρχεται μετὰ τῶν δώδεκα

Mark 11 and Mark 14 signal the beginnings of the two narrative halves of Mk 11-15. Mk 11-12 is about the temple: Jesus enters it, judges it, and teaches in it. Mk 14-15 is centered

⁵⁹See Gray, 8.

on Jesus: He offers his disciples his body and blood, he is arrested and tried, he offers his body and blood on the cross. In between these two halves is Mark 13 which speaks about the end of the temple and the end of the world. Looking at these three parts together, we have a good summary of the flow of Mk 11-15: The time of the temple – and everything it stands for – has come to an end. Jesus establishes a new beginning.

Two scenes in the three-part structure above strengthen the image of Jesus as the New Temple.⁶⁰ The first part (Mk 11-12) ends with the image of the poor widow giving “everything she had, all she had to live on” to the temple (Mk 12:41-44). Early in Mk 14-15 is a parallel image: A woman pours costly genuine spikenard on Jesus’ head. She breaks the alabaster jar the perfumed oil is in; all of the oil, with nothing left or saved, is used to anoint Jesus (Mk 14:3-9). Just as the poor widow gave all she had to the temple, this woman now gives all her oil⁶¹ to Jesus, the New Temple. This anticipates, as Jesus points out (Mk 14:8), his own giving of everything he has.

The temple curtain

The subject of this study is the temple controversy, but I do not want to imply in any way that it is the climax of Mark’s Gospel. Counting the report of the resurrection in Mark 16 as more of an epilogue, as many other exegetes do, the climax must then be when Jesus dies on the cross (Mk 15:33-41). At this particular scene, the temple (now referred to as ναός) is

⁶⁰I am indebted to Timothy Gray for the insight presented here. See Gray, 8-9.

⁶¹The oil was supposed to have cost more than three hundred days’ wages (Mk 14:5). Unless the woman was very wealthy, it can also be said that she gave not just the oil but “everything she had,” just like the poor widow, to Jesus.

again mentioned: “And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom” (Mk 15:38).

Jesus’ temple demonstration was a prophetic act symbolizing the end of the temple, its time, and what it symbolized for the Jews of Jesus’ time. It was a dramatic event that happened in the outer courts as seen by the use of the word ἱερόν in Mk 11:15-16. At Jesus’ even more dramatic death, the climax of Mark’s Gospel and the most definitive sign of God’s eschatological action, we are directed to the inner sanctuary (ναός) of the temple, its very core. We take the temple curtain that Mark refers to here to be the inner veil that served as the barrier to the holy of holies and not just the outer veil that served as the entrance to the sanctuary.⁶² When the veil is torn, the temple is symbolically destroyed. At Jesus’ death, the veil is rent in two. Jesus now becomes the figurative destroyer of the temple. He is vindicated from the mocking he received on the cross (Mk 15:29-30): “Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!” But the final vindication will come when the New Temple “not made with hands” is raised up again in three days.

The torn veil was adorned with stars and constellation – a symbol of the heavens. The temple, in Jewish belief, is the center of the universe.⁶³ Its destruction is a sign of cosmic upheaval, a symbol of the eschatological inbreaking of the new καιρός. When Jesus was baptized by John, the heavens were also reported by Mark to have been torn.⁶⁴ The same verb,

⁶²See Gray’s reasons for positing this (pp. 188-189). The importance of Jesus’ death would also symbolically warrant the choice for the more important veil.

⁶³Meyers, 359-360.

⁶⁴It should be noted that the same verb, σχίζω, is used for the two tearings.

σχίζω, is also used for the tearing of the veil. Moreover, in both reports of tearing, the divine passive is used. God has definitively acted to shred the old era and to begin the new.

CHAPTER II

THE TEMPLE CONTROVERSY IN MATTHEW

Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, "It is written,

*'My house shall be called a house of prayer';
but you are making it a den of robbers."*

The blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he cured them. But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the amazing things that he did, and heard the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David," they became angry and said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read,

*'Out of the mouths of infants and nursing babies
you have prepared praise for yourself?'"*

He left them, went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there (Mt 21:12-17).

Much of what we can be said about Mark, we can say about Matthew. This is because, assuming the two-source theory⁶⁵ of the relationship among the three synoptic Gospels, Matthew is literarily dependent on Mark. But because Matthew's context from which he comes and the community for which he writes are different, he also stresses different concerns.

Continuity and discontinuity

The temple event in Matthew, as in Mark, can be considered a prophetic act. First, the Matthean Jesus is presented many times as a prophet. Hints of Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah,

⁶⁵According to this theory, Matthew and Luke drew on Mark's Gospel and another source of sayings which scholars have reconstructed and called "Q," after the German word for source, *Quelle*. Matthew and Luke also had their own special sources designated respectively as "M" and "L."

and Ezekiel can be seen in the Matthean parallels of the Markan texts cited in our first chapter. A new nuance in Matthew is that Jesus is a prophet like Moses. The infancy narrative shows explicit comparisons between Moses and Jesus: The births of both are threatened by wicked kings (Pharaoh and Herod) who decree the slaughter of Jewish children (Ex 1:16,22 and Mt 2:16-22). Both Moses and Jesus flee from danger (Ex 2:15 and Mt 2:13-15) and seek refuge in foreign lands until the death of those who sought to destroy them (Ex 2:23, 4:19 and Mt 2:15). As the five books of the Torah are credited to Moses, the Matthean Jesus is given five teaching discourses. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7) is also reminiscent of Moses' giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai (Ex 19-20). In Jesus, one can say that the Moses' words, "The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people" (Deut 18:15), are fulfilled. But this will only be a partial fulfillment because the second part of Moses' prophecy goes, "You shall heed such a prophet." As will be pointed out later, Jesus will be rejected by the leaders of the Jews. One final proof: We can say that Jesus' temple demonstration is a prophetic act because, right before Jesus' temple actions, the crowd identifies him as a prophet: "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee" (Mt 21:11).

Aside from "prophet," another title for Jesus figures prominently in the entry into Jerusalem and the temple demonstration – two events which, as discussed earlier, should be treated in close connection. When Jesus enters Jerusalem, the crowd proclaims him as the Son of David (Mt 21:9). In the temple, children cry out, "Hosanna to the Son of David" (Mt 21:15). From the very beginning of Matthew, Jesus is identified not only as the Messiah and the Son of Abraham, but also as the Son of David (Mt 1:1). This is emphasized as the first part of the genealogy ends with David (Mt 1:6), and the second part also begins with David. In the summary of the genealogy, David's name is mentioned twice and serves as a time marker (Mt

1:17). Jesus is also born in Bethlehem, from where David's family comes (Mt 2:5-6). The title "Son of David," it will be shown later, is also important in Jesus' ministry.

Jesus' temple actions in Matthew, as in Mark, can be considered eschatological signs. Like Mark, Matthew uses Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11 to interpret Jesus' actions. As mentioned in the previous chapter, brief quotations from these passages should evoke images of a future temple and judgment on the present temple. The biblical allusions to Zechariah and Malachi that we mentioned in the last chapter are still present in Matthew and still point to the "day of the Lord." Lastly, Jesus' main message in Matthew is still the kingdom of God, again an image of eschatological hope. "Kingdom of heaven," Matthew's way of talking about the kingdom of God, occurs thirty-two times in Matthew.

But the aspect of time is not as strong in Matthew as it is in Mark. It may be argued that the genealogy and the fulfillment quotations Matthew cites are related to the aspect of time. Seven and its multiples are well-known symbols of perfection. That there are fourteen generations from Abraham to David, fourteen generations from David to the deportation to Babylon, and fourteen generations from the exile to the birth of the Messiah should tell us that God has timed everything perfectly. Jesus comes at the time of fulfillment – this is one message of the fulfillment citations. Scriptural prophecies coming true in Jesus are signs that this is the season God has chosen to act. But in Matthew's "thesis statement," *καιρός*, which we emphasized in the last chapter, is not found. Jesus only says, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Mt 4:17).

Matthew keeps the portentous incident with the fig tree (Mt 21:18-22) but does not intercalate it with the temple demonstration. One can still relate what happens to the fig tree

with the temple because of the proximity of the two pericopes, but the one-to-one correspondence is not as emphasized as it is with Mark's "double sandwich." Matthew also drops the Markan line "Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone; so that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses" (Mk 11:25). This, coupled with Matthew having the disciples – and not Peter, as in Mark's account⁶⁶ – notice the withering of the fig tree, tempers the claim we made in the last chapter about the community of disciples being the new temple.⁶⁷ We find ourselves having to be more conservative about the interpretation of the fig tree incident. In Matthew, it seems that this has been relegated to a teaching on faith and prayer. It is also relevant that Matthew does not include the Markan comment that "it was not the season for figs" (Mk 11:13). While this does make Jesus appear more rational at first glance, a deeper reading informed by the meaning of fig tree symbolisms in the Old Testament makes one say that the notion of eschatological time and judgment is downplayed.

In the Matthean account of the temple event itself, the Markan detail of Jesus prohibiting the transport of anything through the precincts is not reported. This greatly affects our image of time being stopped and the time of the temple ceasing. Lesser stress on time and the non-inclusion of important elements of the Markan fig tree incident combine to result in less stress on the idea of Jesus ending one age and beginning another.

Any presentation of Jesus that aspires to be comprehensive must consider a tension between discontinuity and continuity. On the one hand, Jesus creates something new. On the

⁶⁶This is curious for Matthew. As Harrington notes, Peter is often the spokesman for the disciples. It is unusual that Matthew should pass up an opportunity to present Peter as such. (See Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Matthew*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 1 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 297.

⁶⁷This does not mean that Matthew is not concerned with the community anymore. Matthew, after all, is the only Gospel to use ἐκκλησία, and Matthew does have that long discourse on community in Mt 18.

other hand, he comes from a certain tradition and culture, and anything that he tries to communicate must have roots in what is familiar to him and to his audience. Different presentations of Jesus will emphasize different poles of this tension. Mark can be read as tending more towards discontinuity; Matthew, as leaning more towards continuity.

This should not be a surprise considering Matthew's context and community. During Matthew's time, Jews and Jewish Christians faced the crisis that ensued after the destruction of the temple in 70 C.E. How could they continue without the temple? One answer was that of rabbinic Judaism, represented by the scribes and the Pharisees in Matthew's Gospel. Their way of dealing with the crisis was "to go forward as if the temple still stood and the land retained its holiness."⁶⁸ They could do this by focusing on the Torah and applying it to their present situation – the particularly scribal contribution to early rabbinism. Before 70 C.E., the Pharisees were a religious movement distinct from the scribes. The Pharisees' chief concerns were eating food in a state of ritual purity, tithing and giving agricultural offerings to the priests, and keeping the Sabbaths and festivals, to name a few. Theirs was "a cult-centered piety that imposed the temple's purity laws on the table of the ordinary Jews, thus replicating cult in the home."⁶⁹ The combination of legal and Pharisaic currents, together with other priestly traditions, allowed the development of a form of Judaism without temple or political control of the land.

As an answer to the temple's destruction, the early Christians, who were also Jews, centered on Jesus Christ. As part of the proof that his was the authentic way of continuing Judaism, Matthew had to show that Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets. This is achieved

⁶⁸Harrington, 16.

⁶⁹Ibid., 15-16.

through the genealogy, the formula citations, and presenting Jesus as the authentic interpreter of the Torah. This is also shown in the way Matthew presents the temple controversy.

The temple event

One obvious difference already mentioned before between the Markan and Matthean temple controversy accounts is that Matthew does not mention Jesus forbidding anyone to pass through the temple precincts carrying anything. In the Matthean scene, this makes sense because this allows the blind and lame to come to Jesus and be cured by him (Mt 21:14).

Another difference is that Matthew drops the reference to “for all nations” in his quote from Isaiah. This does not mean that Matthew is against the Gentiles. The genealogy contains the Gentile names of Ruth and Rahab (Mt 1:5). Magi from the East were the first to pay Jesus homage and recognize his kingly role (Mt 2:1-12). Jesus praises the Roman centurion’s faith in Mt 8:5-13 with the words, “Truly I tell you, in no one in Israel have I found such faith.” In Mt 12:21 Matthew quotes Isa 42:4 and says of Jesus, “In his name, the Gentiles will hope” (Mt 12:21). Matthew’s Gospel also ends with great commission, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Mt 28:19). Some scholars say that Matthew drops “for all the nations” in Mt 21:13 because the temple is already destroyed by the time of Matthew’s writing and so the Gentiles would not be able to have it as a house of prayer anymore. But this reasoning does not make sense when we take into account that Isa 56:7 is talking about a future temple and not the Herodian temple which was destroyed. There can still be a future temple for the Gentiles. It has been mentioned in the previous chapter how dropping “for all the nations” makes the parallelism between “house of prayer” and “den of robbers” stand out more. But the best explanation

might be that Jesus' mission, at this point in his ministry, is not yet directed to the Gentiles. When he sends out the disciples, he says, "Go nowhere among the Gentiles, and enter no town of the Samaritans, but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 10:5-6). At this point in the story also, the Gentiles are not of Matthew's concern. He tries to make a different point.

The focus of Mt 21:12-16 does not seem to be the clearing of the temple precincts. Only two verses are devoted to the driving out of the sellers and buyers and the overturning of the tables of the moneychangers and those who sold doves. On the other hand, three verses are given to what happens next: The blind and lame come to Jesus for healing, and the children acclaim Jesus as the Son of David. These two events are in fact what make the chief priests and the scribes angry – not Jesus' temple-clearing act. To the chief priests and scribes, Jesus quotes Scripture to affirm that the children are correct.

The healing Son of David

Modern readers can easily make sense of Jesus entering Jerusalem praised as the Son of David. It was David, after all, who established that city, which is why it is called the City of David. That Jesus enters the temple acclaimed as the Son of David should also not surprise because it was Solomon, a son of David, who built the temple. What may seem strange for modern readers is when the Son of David is linked with healing. In Matthew, the Christological title most associated with Jesus' acts of healing is Son of David.⁷⁰ For Jewish readers during Matthew's time, this would not have been surprising at all because traditions

⁷⁰In the fourteen accounts of healing in Matthew, Jesus is known as Son of David four times (Mt 9:27-31, 12:22-23, 15:21-28, 20:29-34); Lord three times (8:1-4; 8:5-13; 17:14-18); Son of God once (8:28-34); Son of Man once (9:1-8); and with no obvious title five times (8:14-15; 9:18,23-26; 9:19-22; 9:32-34; 12:9-14). One general statement of healing is also linked with Son of David (21:9-15). See Wayne Baxter, "Healing and the 'Son of David': Matthew's Warrant," *Novum Testamentum* 48 (2006): 38.

about Solomon's special powers to heal disease and cast out demons were widely attested in Qumran and elsewhere.⁷¹

In Mt 20:29-34, the last healing miracle before the entry into Jerusalem and the temple, Matthew edits the Markan account of the cure of the blind Bartimaeus (Mk 10:46-52) to highlight another aspect of the Son of David. The two blind men shout loudly, "Have mercy on us, Lord, Son of David!" Jesus responds because he is "moved with compassion." As Dennis Duling concludes, "the therapeutic [Duling's term for healing] Son of David is addressed for mercy; as therapeutic Son of David, he responds with 'compassion.'"⁷² The significance of this point will be seen shortly.

The blind and the lame

That Jesus, the Son of David, comes to the temple, heals not just the sick but the blind and the lame is particularly worthy of note. It should evoke David's capture of Jerusalem in 2 Sam 5:6-16. The Jebusites, who were then inhabiting Jerusalem, said to David, "You will not come in here, even the blind and the lame will turn you back" (2 Sam 5:6). A. A. Anderson reads this as a boast: "It seems that the Jebusites regarded their city so impregnable that even the blind and the lame could defend it and repulse David's troops."⁷³ 2 Sam 5:8 must be read as David's similarly taunting reply: "David had said on that day, 'Whoever wishes to strike down the Jebusites, let him get up the water shaft to attack the lame and the blind, those whom David hates.' Therefore it is said, 'The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.'" The

⁷¹Craig Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 285.

⁷²Dennis Duling, "The Therapeutic Son of David: An Element in Matthew's Christological Apologetic," *New Testament Studies* 24 (1978): 404.

⁷³A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 11 (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 82.

“water shaft” we take to mean windpipe or throat. Thus, David’s words can be paraphrased, “Whoever strikes a Jebusite, therefore, must strike at the windpipe or throat of the lame and the blind and, therefore, deliver a fatal blow.”⁷⁴ The “lame and the blind” we take to be synonymous to “the Jebusites,” who would use them to defend the city. When it is reported that David hates the blind and the lame and that they “shall not come into the house,” we should also not think that David has something against the disabled and that they are banned from entering the temple. David only “hates” them in the sense that they opposed him – “them” referring to the Jebusite defenders, not to those who cannot see or walk.

In contrast to David, Jesus, the therapeutic Son in the temple, is approached by the blind and lame of Jerusalem and welcomed. Jesus, by his healing, shows he “hates” blindness and lameness. He “destroys” the blind and lame by giving them back their sight and their strength, making them blind and lame no more.

“I desire mercy and not sacrifice.”

We now try to pull together everything in the Matthean temple scene by appealing to a verse Jesus uttered several chapters before. Before we continue, we must answer a possible objection: Using a verse that is not in a particular pericope to explain that pericope – did we not criticize Sanders about this before? Yes, but our main critique of Sanders was that he dismissed the verses the Markan Jesus used in his temple demonstration (the conflation of Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11 in Mk 11:17) in favor of other verses uttered later (the prophecy of the destruction of the temple in Mk 13:2). We are not going to do the same below. We will

⁷⁴P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction, Notes, and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 9 (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 140.

preserve the use of Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11, the words Jesus uttered to interpret his actions in the temple, but we will also see them in the light of Hos 6:6.

When Jesus drove out the buyers and sellers and overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of the dove sellers in Mt 21:12, he effectively stopped the sacrifice and other temple activities. Was Jesus against sacrifice? In Mark, we said no, but in Matthew, we have to say that, at the very least, Jesus did not give it priority. Twice before, the Matthean Jesus, quoting Hos 6:6, had said, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (Mt 9:13 and 12:7). The first time was in the context of Jesus’ table-fellowship with tax collectors and sinners, right before the question about fasting. The second time happened after Jesus’ disciples picked grain on the Sabbath. Now, both instances are not really about sacrifice. Using the method we employed in the previous chapter, we must now look at the wider context of Hos 6:6.

Looking at Hos 5:1-6:6 as a unit, we agree with Francis Andersen and David Noel Freedman when they conclude that Hos 6:6 “makes a basic statement which is the foundation of all that precedes. As the rhetorical climax of the entire section, it is also the final truth.”⁷⁵ And what precedes verse 6? Israel is judged because of its whoredom – she does not know her Lord anymore (Hos 5:4). Because of her disloyalty, the Lord will not join the people’s pilgrimages and festivals (Hos 5:6). Israel is judged and hewn like a stone (Hos 6:5) because what the Lord desires is “steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings” (Hos 6:6). The main focus of this pericope is summarized in Hos 6:3: “Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord.”

⁷⁵Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Hosea: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 24 (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), 430.

When in Mt 9:9-13 the Pharisees object to Jesus eating with sinners and tax collectors, Jesus rebukes them with Hos 6:6, evoking the message that they really do not know what the Lord is about. When in Mt 12:1-8 the Pharisees object to Jesus' disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath, Jesus' use of Hos 6:6 reiterates that these so-called religious people do not really know the Lord.

In Mt 21:12-13, Jesus' temple act demonstrates that sacrifice, offerings, and other temple activities – the old ways the people of Jesus' time lived out their beliefs – are judged as having come to an end. This we are able to say on the strength of the allusion to Jer 7:11. “Den of robbers” also fits very well here. During Jeremiah's time, people felt secure that they would be safe because of the temple. But the temple then and the temple in Matthew's Gospel could not save the people. Where is the future of the temple and all of Judaism (to which Isa 56:7 points)? Jesus' next action presents the reader of Matthew – who knows that the temple is already destroyed – with a choice: Do you just keep on going as if the temple were still standing (symbolized by the sacrifice in the temple), or do you try to recognize and get to know what the Lord is doing in Jesus? Putting ourselves in the scene of the temple event, we are asked to choose between the way of sacrifice or the way of mercy which God desires.

Jesus, the Son of David, shows mercy and compassion by his healing the blind and the lame. The challenge Jesus issues right before he quotes Hos 6:6 in Mt 9:13 should ring in our ears: “Go now and learn what this means.” So, too, what Jesus says before he quotes Hos 6:6 in Mt 12:7: “Something greater than the temple is here.”

Jesus, the Son of David, is the way to continue living out Judaism after the temple's destruction. The children, the little ones to whom the kingdom of heaven belongs (Mt 19:14),

those to whom the Father has revealed what he has hidden from the wise (Mt 11:25), recognize this, but the Jewish leaders⁷⁶ do not.

Mt 23:37-39, Jesus' words before leaving the temple for the very last time, can be seen as a summary of what happened in the temple and Jerusalem: "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing" (v. 37) – Jesus wanted to show them mercy and compassion, but he was rejected. "See, your house is left to you, desolate" (v. 38) – thus, Jerusalem and the temple are judged. "For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord'" (v. 39) – the only way to continue is to recognize and know the Lord through Jesus.

⁷⁶In the temple scene, it is the chief priests and the scribes who oppose Jesus. The chief priests are there because Jesus' act is seen to be against the temple. The scribes are there representing the Pharisees and the rabbinic Judaism. In the "woes" to the scribes and Pharisees, we see the other side of this representation when the Pharisees alone are addressed when both are obviously meant (see Mt 23:26).

CHAPTER III

THE TEMPLE CONTROVERSY IN LUKE

*Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; and he said, "It is written,
'My house shall be a house of prayer';
but you have made it a den of robbers."
Every day he was teaching in the temple. The chief priests, the scribes, and the leaders of the people kept looking for a way to kill him; but they did not find anything they could do, for all the people were spellbound by what they heard (Lk 19:45-48).*

Again, much of what can be said about Mark, we can say about Luke. Literarily dependent on Mark, Luke uses some sixty percent⁷⁷ of what we assume to be the first of the canonical Gospels.

The Lukan Jesus is a prophet. He applies the title of prophet to himself (Lk 4:25). He puts himself in the line of Elijah and Elisha (Lk 4:25-27) as a prophet of mighty deeds, and in the line of Isaiah (Lk 4:17-21) as a prophet anointed to announce the good news. Later on, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus will refer to him as "a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people" (Lk 24:19).

Jesus' message, as in Mark, is eschatological. There are thirty-two occurrences of "kingdom of God," which is still central to Jesus' preaching. Luke may not have Mark's and

⁷⁷Cyprian Robert Hutcheon, "'God is with Us': The Temple in Luke-Acts," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 44 (2000): 6.

Matthew's programmatic statement about the nearness of the kingdom and repentance (Mk 1:15, Mt 4:17), but when the Lukan Jesus begins his ministry in Galilee, he proclaims the summary of his mission: "To bring good news to the poor, ...to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Lk 4:18-19). The language of "release" and "year of the Lord's favor" can be read as an allusion to the Jubilee year (see Lev 25:10-18), which functions in later Scriptures as a typology of the ideal age when God will reign supreme.⁷⁸ Focusing on the subject of our study, we observe that the eschatological notes from allusions to Zechariah, Malachi, Isaiah, and Jeremiah which we mentioned before still ring loud in the passages dealing with the entry into Jerusalem and the temple controversy.

As similar as Luke is to the other two synoptic Gospels, Jesus' temple actions are most problematic for the third Gospel. Perhaps this is why Luke's account of the temple controversy is the shortest among the Gospels. Luke mentions "temple" more than any other New Testament writer. Fourteen times in his Gospel and twenty-five times in Acts, ἱερόν (referring to the temple buildings, precincts, and courts) appears. Even combined, the rest of the New Testament books mention ἱερόν less. There are four occurrences of ναός (referring to the inner sanctuary) in Luke and two in Acts. Finally, Luke also uses οἶκος four times in his Gospel and once in Acts to refer to the House of the Lord.⁷⁹

Seeing the temple as a metonymy for Jerusalem and vice versa, the temple can also be considered as an "organizing principle" for understanding the structure of Luke-Acts. Luke

⁷⁸See John Hartley's discussion on the eschatological implications of the Jubilee in *Leviticus*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 4 (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 446-448.

⁷⁹Hutcheon, 7-8.

begins and ends in the temple, and the temple/Jerusalem construct divides the Gospel of Luke neatly into three principal parts: First, Lk 1:5-25 and 2:22-40 bracket the infancy narratives with scenes in the temple involving two old pairs – Zechariah and Elizabeth, then Simeon and Anna. Lk 2:41-52, the loss and finding of Jesus in the temple, can be seen as a “bridge passage”⁸⁰ to Jesus’ adult ministry presented in Lk 3:1-19:27 (from the mission in Galilee through the journey to Jerusalem), the second part of the Gospel. This brings us to Lk 19:28-24:52, Jesus’ ministry in the temple and his death, resurrection, and ascension, all set in Jerusalem, the temple-city.⁸¹ The temple can also be seen as providing a literary *inclusio* for the Acts of the Apostles. Acts begins in the temple-city and ends with a quotation from Isa 6:9-10, which is part of proto-Isaiah’s temple vision.⁸²

Luke also has a very positive regard for the temple. It is the place where Zechariah receives news of “joy and gladness,” a revelation of the beginning of God’s fulfillment of his promises (Lk 1:5-24). It is where Simeon is guided by the Spirit to go in order for him to see the Messiah (Lk 2:25-35). It was where another devout person, Anna, who is considered a prophet by Luke, stays (she never leaves the temple!) and speaks about the redemption of Jerusalem after she sees the child Jesus (Lk 2:36-38). The temple is also called “my Father’s house” by Jesus (Lk 2:49). Lastly, at the end of Luke, the disciples are seen blessing God continually in the temple (Lk 24:53).

⁸⁰This will be expounded on later.

⁸¹Francis Weinert suggests a similar tripartite structure. See Francis D. Weinert, “The Meaning of the Temple in Luke-Acts,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 11 (1981): 85-86.

⁸²Hutcheon, 4.

Still, in his account of the temple controversy, Luke keeps the conflation of Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11, passages which evoke a future temple and the end of the present one, as Jesus' interpretation of his temple act (Lk 19:46).⁸³ Luke does not include the cursing of the fig tree in his Gospel, but the theme of judgment on Jerusalem and the temple cannot be denied because of Jesus' words as he came near the city and wept, words uttered right before his temple act:

If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. Indeed, the days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another; because you did not recognize the time of your visitation from God (Lk 19:42-44).

The last line above gives the reason for the judgment: Jerusalem did not recognize God's visitation. We will touch on this point again later.

While having a positive view of the temple, Luke does not preclude its end.⁸⁴ He generally follows Mark, but he puts his own "spin" on the temple controversy. To appreciate this better, we must first look at the other temple scenes in Luke.

⁸³Luke drops "for all nations" in the quote from Isaiah. Similar to our discussion of this in Matthew, this does not mean that Luke is against Gentiles. Luke, in fact, is recognized as the Gospel of the Gentiles. In Lk 2:32, Simeon prophesies that the child Jesus will be "a light for revelation to the Gentiles." The Acts of the Apostles, seen by many as the second part of Luke's Gospel, is a movement of the proclamation of the good news to the Gentiles. As we said in the previous chapter about Matthew, Luke probably does not include "for all nations" because they are not yet the focus of Jesus' message at this point in the narrative. If the intention of quoting Isa 56:7 is to call to mind images of the future temple and eschatology, citing "shall be a house of prayer" is enough to do that.

⁸⁴This would have been impossible because by the time of Luke's writing, the temple was most probably already destroyed.

The temple in the infancy narratives

Lk 1:5-25, the story of Zechariah receiving the news of the birth of John the Baptist, and Lk 1:26-38, Mary's saying yes to be the mother of Jesus, are two pericopes that have been compared and contrasted as an annunciation "diptych."⁸⁵ The point of many of these comparisons is how Jesus is greater than John the Baptist: For example, whereas John will be "great in the sight of the Lord" (Lk 1:15), Jesus "will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give to him the throne of his ancestor David" (Lk 1:32).

We now focus our lenses more finely and look for ideas about the temple. In Lk 1:5-25, the temple is a place of divine revelation of "good news." Lk 1:26-38 takes place in the backwater town of Nazareth in Galilee. But our attention should be called by the rare verb ἐπισκιάζω in v. 35, translated as overshadow: To Mary's question about how she can conceive and bear a son when she is a virgin, the angel Gabriel answers, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will *overshadow* you; therefore the child to be born will be holy; he will be called Son of God." The verb ἐπισκιάζω is used only four other times in the New Testament: three times in the synoptic Gospels referring to the overshadowing cloud present in the transfiguration (Mk 9:7; Mt 17:5; and Lk 9:34); and in Acts 5:15 to describe Peter's healing shadow. In the Septuagint, ἐπισκιάζω is also used rarely – only four times, with one instance very significant for our study: Ex 40:35, "Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled (ἐπεσκίαζεν) upon it, and the glory (δόξης or כְּבוֹד in Hebrew) of the Lord filled the tabernacle." Very similar language is used in 1 Kgs 8:10-11: "And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the

⁸⁵Raymond E. Brown, *The Birth of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 251.

house of the Lord.” Because of the cloud, the priests could not minister. According to the *Jewish Encyclopedia*, “priests were the emissaries, not of the people, but of God.”⁸⁶ With the glory of the Lord so present, there was also no more need for priests to minister. When Gabriel tells Mary that the power of God will *overshadow* her, temple language is evoked. “In some mysterious way, the presence of God (whether conceived as *dynamis*, *doxa*, *kabod*, or *shekinah*) will come to ‘dwell’ in her, just as God was believed to dwell in the [first] Jerusalem temple.”⁸⁷

We must note that, according to the Babylonian Talmud (*Yoma* 22b), the second temple lacked five things which had been in the first temple of Solomon: the Ark; the sacred fire; the *Urim* and *Thummim*; the Holy Spirit; and the *shekinah*.⁸⁸ Talking about the second temple, N. T. Wright observes:

...Israel’s god had not returned to Zion. Nowhere in the so-called post-exilic literature is there any passage corresponding to 1 Kings 8:10f., according to which, when Solomon’s temple had been finished, “a cloud filled the house of YHWH, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of YHWH filled the house of YHWH.” Instead, Israel clung to the promises that one day the *shekinah* [italics added], the glorious presence of her god, would return at last....⁸⁹

While Zechariah, the priest in the temple, receives a message from God, it is in a young peasant girl in Nazareth that God has chosen to dwell. The imagery here is probably the origin

⁸⁶ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Priest,” <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/12358-priest> (accessed March 26, 2013).

⁸⁷ Hutcheon, 12. I am indebted to Hutcheon for the ideas concerning the word ἐπισκιάζω.

⁸⁸ *Jewish Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Temple, the Second,” <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/14309-temple-the-second> (accessed March 26, 2013).

⁸⁹ Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 269.

of hymns praising Mary as the “Temple of God.” But Mary is a temple not really because of her personal attributes but because God’s glory is truly present in her womb.

Glory or δόξα is many times associated with Jesus in the Gospel of Luke. When he is born, a multitude of the heavenly host sings, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors” (Lk 2:14). Simeon, holding the child Jesus in his arms, identifies him as “a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel” (Lk 2:32). The song of the angels is later echoed in Lk 19:38 by a multitude of disciples praising Jesus as he enters Jerusalem, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!” Jesus is very closely connected with the glory of God.

The loss and finding of Jesus in the temple

It is not an insignificant detail when Luke tells us that Jesus was twelve years old when he is brought to the temple again. The age of twelve marks the start of adulthood for the Jews. What Jesus does in the temple in Lk 2:41-51 already shows what he will be doing as a mature adult in his ministry. This is why we consider it a “bridge passage” to the mission of the grown-up Jesus. And what did he do in the temple in Lk 2:41-51? He was “sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions” (Lk 2:46). Since “all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers,” it can be argued that he was already teaching. While the Markan Jesus is involved in many exorcisms and the Matthean Jesus performs many healings, what is characteristic of the Lukan Jesus is his teaching (see Lk 4:31; 5:3,17; 6:6; 13:10,22; 19:47; 20:1,21; 21:37; 23:5; and Acts 1:1).

The temple scene

The two points above on Jesus as the glory of God and Jesus the teacher are recapitulated in the temple event in Lk 19:45-48. In contrast to Mark and Matthew, Luke reports that Jesus drove out only the sellers. It would be tempting to say that the Lukan Jesus was only against the conduct of trade in the temple, but again, the text does not support this reading. The conflation of Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11 in Lk 19:45 is the clearest interpretation of Jesus' demonstration: It was an eschatological judgment on the temple. Why are only the sellers expelled? It is because of what Jesus does next: He teaches. With the merchants gone, Jesus now teaches their customers and whomever else is in the precincts willing to listen. This has been foreshadowed already when the twelve-year-old Jesus first amazed people in the temple with his understanding. But if the temple has already been judged as ended, why does Jesus still teach in the temple?

It is not only because this is Jesus' characteristic activity. One issue that Luke tries to address in his Gospel is theodicy. Thoughtful Gentiles receiving Luke's Gospel would have been faced with a simple but profound problem:

God's promises had been made to Israel, that is the *Jewish* people, through Abraham (Gen 12:1-3). If that historical people was not now in possession of the blessings, and other people were [i.e., the Gentiles], what did that imply about God's faithfulness to his promises? Had God utterly betrayed his people? And in so doing, had he also proven himself faithless?⁹⁰

Jesus continuing his teaching ministry in the doomed temple shows God still reaching out to whomever would listen. As in Lk 15, he is still seeking out the lost sheep, not giving up on the lost coin, and still waiting for the lost son to return. The disciples, too, continue to teach

⁹⁰Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 3, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 10.

in the temple after Jesus' ascension, while there are those among the Jews still wanting to be taught. God is faithful to his promises. It is Israel – or more precisely, its leaders and some of its people – who have rejected God and not recognized the time of their visitation. But those who did recognize God's visit become the core of a new people who then reach out to the Gentiles and all the nations.

When Jesus teaches in the temple after he clears it, he does not seem to leave the temple anymore. In Mark, it is reported that after the temple demonstration, “when evening came, Jesus and his disciples went out of the city” (Mk 11:19). In Matthew, after curing the blind and lame, Jesus “went out of the city to Bethany, and spent the night there” (Mt 21:17). Luke structures his account so that Jesus is not reported to have gone out of the temple until Lk 21:37, where it is finally noted that, while Jesus was teaching in the temple during the day – and people were coming to him to listen from early in the morning – he spends the nights on the Mount of Olives. But before this explanation, one gets the impression that Jesus, like the prophetess Anna, never left the temple. Hutcheon describes this as Jesus' “occupying” the temple.⁹¹ Reminding ourselves that Jesus would enter the temple every day from the Mount of Olives, which is east of the temple, we catch a glimpse of Ezek 43:1-5: “The glory (*kabod*) of the God of Israel was coming from the east... and the glory (*kabod*) of the Lord filled the temple.” Jesus' teaching and staying in the temple now fulfills this vision.

When the fully-grown Jesus first entered the temple, he cleared out the sellers, and as was discussed before in Matthew and Mark, effectively stopped the temple activity. The priests would not have been able to perform the sacrifice anymore without the animals that the

⁹¹Hutcheon, 14.

sellers provided. The priests of the Herodian temple would not have been able to minister – as was the case with the priests of Solomon’s temple when God’s glory filled the temple. But again, they did not have to minister or act as emissaries of God anymore because the *doxa* of God in Jesus was already there. So Klaus Baltzer concludes, “When Jesus enters the temple or is in the temple, the temple is really the temple.”⁹² Finally, the *shekinah*, the *kabod*, the *doxa* of God has returned to the temple. The people’s eschatological hopes are fulfilled – but how many will recognize the time of their visitation as Elizabeth did when Mary came to her (Lk 1:39-45)? How many will “leap for joy” and see that the Lord has come again? And how many will try to look for ways to kill him (Lk 19:47)?

⁹²Klaus Baltzer, “The Meaning of the Temple in the Lukan Writings,” *Harvard Theological Review* (1965): 275.

CHAPTER IV

THE TEMPLE CONTROVERSY IN JOHN

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves "Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!" His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for your house will consume me." The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken (Jn 2:13-22).

As mysterious and enigmatic as the Fourth Gospel is in many passages, its account of the temple controversy is the least puzzling among the four Gospels. The interpretative lenses provided by Jesus' words, the disciples' recollections, and the narrator's comments combine to make clear what John wants to communicate about the temple incident.

Much of what we have said about Jesus in Mark, Matthew, and Luke still applies to John. The Johannine Jesus, though certainly more than a prophet, engages in prophetic activities like the Jesus we have met in the synoptic Gospels. After the feeding of the five thousand, the people point to Jesus as "indeed the prophet who is to come into the world" (Jn 6:14). He is again acknowledged as "really the prophet" in Jn 7:40, though there is a division

among the people about this. Referring to himself, Jesus also “testified that a prophet has no honor in the prophet’s own country” (Jn 4:44). Though “kingdom of God” is only mentioned twice (in Jn 3:3 and 3:5), the Johannine Jesus’ message is still eschatological. Many of the signs Jesus performs in John point to the fulfillment of Messianic hopes, as will be shown later.

One obvious way that John’s narration of the temple controversy differs from the synoptic Gospels is its placement early in Jesus’ ministry. To account for this, some scholars have posited the possibility of two temple demonstrations, but the majority opinion is that there was probably only one such event late in Jesus’ career. Conflict in the temple at the beginning of Jesus’ mission would have made it difficult for Jesus and his disciples to move about, and it might have resulted in Jesus getting arrested sooner. It is therefore more profitable for us to read John’s account of the temple “cleansing” theologically rather than historically. And what theological point was John trying to make?

The Johannine interpretation of the temple demonstration

We can easily get derailed by the issue of violence and a seemingly angry Jesus in Jn 2:13-22. Much ink has been spilled about the whip of cords Jesus wields. I agree with Ernst Haenchen, Robert Walter Funk, and Ulrich Busse when they say:

Since one cannot drive animals merely with one’s hands, Jesus made “a kind of whip” (read ὡς φραγγέλλιον) out of the cords with which the animals had been tethered. He did not use it against people, but drove the animals out with it.⁹³

⁹³Ernst Haenchen, Robert Walter Funk, and Ulrich Busse, *John: A Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Hermeneia — A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 183.

The whip was not used to punish πάντας or “all” (Jn 2:15) the sellers and money changers, but only to make “both the sheep and the cattle” go in a certain direction. What more efficient way is there to drive out animals? To support this not-so-violent picture of Jesus, we note the way he got rid of the doves in Jn 2:16: He did not destroy their cages; he told the dove sellers, “Take these things out of here!” John also gives us the motivation of Jesus’ actions. It was not anger but zeal (ζῆλος in Jn 2:17): “Zeal for your house will consume me.” The shift to the future tense (Ps 69:9 is in the aorist) reminds us of his coming passion and death.⁹⁴

Among the Gospels, the temple clearing in John has the clearest link to the eschatological image painted in Zech 14:21 (“And there shall no longer be traders in the house of the Lord (τῷ οἴκῳ κυρίου) of hosts on that day”). The stronger association is made not only through Jesus’ actions of expelling the money changers and the sellers of cattle, sheep, and doves (not including the buyers, as in Mark and Matthew) but through Jesus’ reference to the temple in Jn 2:16 as “my Father’s house” (τὸν οἶκον τοῦ πατρὸς μου). The evocation of Zech 14:21 should also make it clear that Jesus’ action was not merely a protest against trade; the main idea of Zech 14 is stated from its very beginning: “See, a day is coming for the Lord...” (Zech 14:1).

John drops the conflation of Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11 that the synoptic Gospels use to interpret Jesus’ actions. But their meaning is still here. The Johannine Jesus’ expulsion of the traders signals not only the end of the trade and not only the end of the sacrifices which the trade makes possible, but all the activities in the temple and the very temple itself. Again, this

⁹⁴Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John*, Sacra Pagina, vol. 4, ed. Daniel J. Harrington (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998): 77-78.

is the point of Jer 7:11. On the other hand, the allusion to Zech 14:21 evokes the futurity and eschatological promise of Isa 56:7.

In Jn 2:18, the “Jews” must have understood Jesus’ act, if not as an eschatological sign, then at least as a prophetic demonstration. They do not ask him, “Why do you do this?” but instead demand some sort of legitimation for his actions and words: “What sign can you show us for doing this?” Mary Coloe sees that behind this is the figure of Moses whose authority was proven by “signs and wonders” (Deut 34:11).⁹⁵ To this we can add Deut 18:21-22: “You may say to yourself, ‘How can we recognize a word that the Lord has not spoken?’ If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord but the thing does not take place or prove true, it is a word that the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do not be frightened by it.”

Jesus’ answer to the “Jews” reveals another aspect of his temple demonstration: “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (Jn 2:19). The word that Jesus uses for “temple” here is ναός, while in verses 14 and 15, ἱερόν is used to refer to the temple. The switch should be a signal for us that Jesus is also changing referents. In the first part of his statement in Jn 2:19, Jesus could still be talking about the Herodian temple, which by the time of John’s writing was already destroyed. This can be one meaning of a double-entendre. In the second part of the statement, if the mention of “three days” is not enough of a clue for the reader that Jesus is already talking about himself, the narrator’s comment dispels all doubt:

⁹⁵Mary L. Coloe, “Temple Imagery in John,” *Interpretation* 63 (2009): 372.

“He was speaking of the temple of his body” (Jn 2:21).⁹⁶ Jesus has performed the temple act to point to himself as the New Temple.

John’s prologue already hints at this. There we read how “the Word, present with God in eternity, ‘became flesh and tabernacled (*eskēnōsen*) among us, and we saw his glory (*doxa*)’ (1:14). The choice of the terms *skēnē* and *doxa* to describe the incarnation evokes long traditions of God’s presence in Israel’s midst and the physical symbols for that presence – the ark, the tabernacle, and the temple.”⁹⁷

Fulfillment

The temple demonstration in John is placed right after the miracle at Cana, where Jesus changes water into wine (Jn 2:1-12). There is so much more than just physical change in this symbolically rich pericope. The water, which was supposed to be “for the Jewish rites of purification” (Jn 2:6) can be a synecdoche for the old system – an imperfect system as signaled by the detail of the six water jars, one less than the perfect number seven. Jesus perfects this system with the wine of the grace and truth. As Jn 1:17 already proclaimed, “The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” The “inferior wine” (Jn 2:10) has now become better wine. This happens during a wedding feast, in itself already a parable of the kingdom of heaven (see Mt 22:1-14)?

⁹⁶ In the next verse, the disciples’ recollection is reported: “After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.” This fulfills the test described in Deut 18:22.

⁹⁷Coloe, 370.

The theme of perfection or fulfillment also runs through other parts of the Gospel, especially during Jewish feasts.⁹⁸ In John 6, around the time of Passover or the Feast of Unleavened Bread, Jesus multiplies loaves (vv. 1-15) and, the next day, identifies himself as “the bread of life” (v. 35).

During the Feast of Tabernacles or *Sukkot*, Jesus is once more depicted as being in the temple, if not for a considerable amount of time then for a significant number of verses (Jn 7:1-10:21). The theme of fulfillment here will be clearer when we consider how *Sukkot* is celebrated.

By the time of the New Testament, there were three ceremonies incorporated in the Feast of Tabernacles: the water libation ceremony, the ceremony of light, and the rite of facing the temple.⁹⁹

During the water libation ceremony, a procession led by priests and Levites would go down to the Pool of Siloam and fetch water with a golden vessel. From the pool, they would go to the temple area and a designated priest would pour the water, together with wine, into two vessels placed on the altar. The water would be allowed to flow out of the vessels and onto the altar as a sign of an abundance of water and rain – very important gifts for the people in Palestine. This would be done every morning for the seven days of *Sukkot*, which is celebrated near the beginning of the rainy season.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸See Gale Yee’s work on this topic in Gale A. Yee, *Jewish Feasts and the Gospel of John* (Wilmington: Michael Glazier, 1989).

⁹⁹In this part, I follow Moloney (232-311) closely.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 234.

For the ceremony of light, four menorahs would be set up in the court of the women. The men celebrating the feast would dance under the lights for most of the night during the seven days of the festival. Moloney quotes the Mishnah describing the light from the temple: “There was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that did not reflect the light of the House of Water Drawing” (*m. Sukk.* 5:3).¹⁰¹

The rite of facing the temple began at cockcrow on each of the seven days of the *Sukkot*. The priests would at first have their faces to the East, but at the moment the sun rose, they turned their backs on it and faced the sanctuary of the Temple saying, as Moloney quotes the Mishnah, “Our fathers when they were in this place turned with their backs toward the temple of the Lord and their faces toward the east, and they worshipped the sun toward the east; but as for us, our eyes are turned toward the Lord” (*m. Sukk.* 5:4).¹⁰²

Elements of Messianic expectation, influenced by images from Zech 14, pervaded the celebration of *Sukkot* and the ceremonies described above. The Messiah was linked to the “definitive gift of water from the well,” the coming of continuous light, and the recognition of the Lord as king over all the earth.¹⁰³

On the last day of the Feast of *Sukkot*, when the ceremonies of water, light, and turning away ceased, Jesus proclaims in the temple, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink” (Jn 7:37). Later on he says, “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life” (8:12). The

¹⁰¹Ibid., 235.

¹⁰²Ibid., 236.

¹⁰³Ibid., 234-236.

message is clear: Jesus fulfills the hopes embedded in the ceremonies of *Sukkot*. In a great example of Johannine irony, when Jesus proclaims who he is, he is rejected by many of the Jews. Though some believe him, many try to stone him. They fail to recognize who Jesus is when in the morning of that day and the six before it, they had proclaimed, “Our eyes are turned toward the Lord.”

The New Temple

In Mark we pointed out how the New Temple was embodied in Jesus and in the community of disciples. The community figures strongly again in John during *Sukkot*:

On the last day of the festival, the great day, while Jesus was standing there, he cried out, “Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink. As the scripture has said, ‘Out of his (αὐτοῦ) heart shall flow rivers of living water.’” Now he said this about the Spirit, which believers in him were to receive; for as yet there was no Spirit, because Jesus was not yet glorified (Jn 7:37-39).

We can read this as pointing to Jesus as the source of water, and from his heart, rivers of living water shall flow. But, with many scholars, we can also read “his” (αὐτοῦ) as referring to the one who believes and who drinks. Coloe sees “the scripture” as referring to Ezekiel 47¹⁰⁴ which paints a striking image of the eschatological temple: Ever-deepening waters flow from it, and this enlivens deserts. The community of believers, once the Spirit comes, will be this new temple.

Is this reading supported in other parts of the Fourth Gospel? Coloe points to Jn 14-15, which, in mentions of οἰκία τοῦ πατρὸς μου (my Father's house) and μοναὶ (dwelling places)

¹⁰⁴Coloe, 374.

and the many uses of the verb μένω (dwell, abide), recalls temple language.¹⁰⁵ Coloe's exegesis allows her to conclude that Jn 14:2 should be read thus:

...the phrase in my Father's house are many dwellings, is best understood to mean a series of inter personal relationships made possible because of the indwellings of the Father, Jesus, and the Paraclete with and in the believer. The divine indwellings in the midst of a believing community makes it appropriate to speak of the community as a living temple, where God can now be found. The community is the house (household) of God.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵For a more detailed treatment of this, see Coloe, 374-377.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., 376.

CONCLUSION

Did this happen?

As we already noted in our introduction, E. P. Sanders, in line with the majority of New Testament exegetes, considers the temple controversy as one of the “almost indisputable facts” of Jesus’ life, a secure piece of evidence – bedrock – from which we can move to study less certain evidence. But some scholars see the temple controversy as just convenient fiction. Paula Fredricksen writes:

Other critics, rightly observing the crucial role played by the Temple incident in Mark’s rendition of Jesus’ story — without it, Mark would have difficulty bringing Jesus to the attention of the priests — question whether it ever happened at all. Actual history rarely obliges narrative plotting so exactly....¹⁰⁷

Thus, Burton Mack concludes, “The act itself is contrived. Some gesture was required that could symbolize both casting out and taking charge with some level of legitimacy... The temple act cannot be historical.”¹⁰⁸ Fredricksen summarizes the disagreement of scholars: “In

¹⁰⁷Paula Fredriksen, *Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews: A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 210.

¹⁰⁸See his argument in Burton Mack, *A Myth of Innocence: Mark and Christian Origins* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 291-292.

research on the historical Jesus, however, no single consensus interpretation ever commands 100 percent of the scholarly opinion.”¹⁰⁹

Of the five primary criteria that John P. Meier lists in judging the historicity of a word or deed of Jesus,¹¹⁰ the temple controversy satisfies four. First, multiple attestation: All the Gospels report an incident in the temple. Moreover, Jesus’ predictions of the temple’s destruction (Mk 13:2, Mt 24:2, and Lk 21:5-6) and various accusations that Jesus threatened the temple in the trial before the Sanhedrin (Mk 14:58 and Mt 26:61), in the crucifixion scene (Mk 15:29-30 and Mt 27:40), and during the persecution of Stephen (Acts 6:14) make us say that Jesus must have done or said something against the temple. Second, coherence: As we have shown in the previous chapters, Jesus’ temple act would have been consistent with his being a prophet and his eschatological message. Third, embarrassment: Luke would have had trouble incorporating the temple controversy in his narrative because of his positive view of the temple and his defense of God as faithful to his promises to Israel, but still Luke includes this scene, albeit in the shortest presentation among the Gospels. Fourth, Jesus’ rejection and execution: In all four Gospels, Jesus’ actions in the temple meet questions and opposition. The conflict in the temple is at least one factor in his death.

The criterion of discontinuity with Judaism is not satisfied because, as we have shown, other prophets have spoken and demonstrated against the temple and Jerusalem. Luke records that the early Christians still went to the temple, but Jesus’ temple act cannot be read as counter to this. As discussed in the chapter on Luke, the early Christians’ temple activities

¹⁰⁹Fredricksen, 210.

¹¹⁰See a summary of the primary criteria and other secondary supports for these in John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew, Rethinking the Historical Jesus: Volume Two, Mentor, Message, and Miracles* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1994), 5-6.

were signs that God was still reaching out to the Jews. Also, one of the main points of Jesus' demonstration is that he is above the Herodian temple, a conviction that the early Christians certainly held.

On the question of the historicity of the temple controversy, I side with Sanders when he says, "It is overwhelmingly probable that Jesus did something in the temple and said something about its destruction."¹¹¹

Could this have happened?

While we can never verify whether the temple demonstration did happen or not, we can at least show if it *could* have happened. This thesis has made an effort to show how Jesus can be considered a prophet in all four Gospels. Other prophets in Hebrew Scripture have spoken and demonstrated against the temple and Jerusalem. As another parallel to Jesus' actions, we can also point to how Nehemiah threw the furniture of Tobiah the Ammonite out of the temple room where grain-offering, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithes were once kept. Tobiah had taken over a chamber of the house of the Lord with the cooperation of Eliashib, the high priest, and this, in Nehemiah's eyes, had defiled the chambers, necessitating a cleansing (see Neh 13: 4-9).

Around thirty years after Jesus' ministry, in 62 C.E., another Jesus held a demonstration in the temple. Josephus reports this, and because of the many points of comparison with the career of Jesus of Nazareth, we quote it at length:

There was one Jesus, the son of Ananus, a plebeian and a husbandman, who, four years before the war began, and at a time when the city was in very great peace and prosperity, came to that feast whereon it is our custom for everyone to make

¹¹¹Sanders, 61.

tabernacles to God in the temple, began on a sudden cry aloud, “A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds, a voice against Jerusalem and the holy house, a voice against the bridegrooms and the brides, and a voice against this whole people!” This was his cry, as he went about by day and by night, in all the lanes of the city. However, certain of the most eminent among the populace had great indignation at this dire cry of his, and took up the man, and gave him a great number of severe stripes; yet did not he either say anything for himself, or anything peculiar to those that chastised him, but still he went on with the same words which he cried before. Hereupon our rulers supposing, as the case proved to be, that this was a sort of divine fury in the man, brought him to the Roman procurator; where he was whipped till his bones were laid bare; yet did he not make any supplication for himself, nor shed any tears, but turning his voice to the most lamentable tone possible, at every stroke of the whip his answer was, “Woe, woe to Jerusalem!” And when Albinus (for he was then our procurator) asked him who he was, and whence he came, and why he uttered such words; he made no manner of reply to what he said, but still did not leave off his melancholy ditty, till Albinus took him to be a madman, and dismissed him. Now, during all the time that passed before the war began, this man did not go near any of the citizens, nor was seen by them while he said so; but he every day uttered these lamentable words, as if it were his premeditated vow, “Woe, woe, to Jerusalem!” Nor did he give ill words to any of those that beat him every day, nor good words to those that gave him food; but this was his reply to all men, and indeed no other than a melancholy presage of what was to come. This cry of his was the loudest at the festivals; and he continued this ditty for seven years and five months, without growing hoarse, or being tired therewith, until the very time that he saw his presage in earnest fulfilled in our siege, when it ceased; for as he was going round upon the wall, he cried out with his utmost force, “Woe, woe, to the city again, and to the people, and to the holy house!” And just as he added at the last,—“Woe, woe, to myself also!” there came a stone out of one of the engines, and smote him, and killed him immediately; and as he was uttering the very same presages, he gave up the ghost (Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, book 6, chapter 5, section 3, §§300-309).¹¹²

Craig Evans traces the parallelisms between Jesus of Nazareth and Jesus ben Ananias: Both entered the precincts of the temple at the time of a religious festival. Both spoke of doom for Jerusalem and the temple. Both alluded to Jer 7 (“cave of robbers”: Jer 7:11 in Mark 11:17; “the voice against the bridegroom and the bride”: Jer 7:34, see above). Both were accosted by Jewish leaders. Both were beaten by the Jewish authorities. Both were handed over to the

¹¹²Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987), Logos Bible Software edition.

Roman governor and interrogated. Both refused to answer. Both were scourged.¹¹³ Could Jesus of Nazareth have performed a temple demonstration? Someone else close to his time did!

What does this mean?

While we can only conjecture about the temple event's historicity and verisimilitude, whether a temple demonstration did happen and whether it could have happened, what we can be most certain of is what such a demonstration, as reported by each Gospel, means. In Mark, Jesus cleared the temple as an eschatological prophet to signal the end of one age and the beginning of another. In Matthew, Jesus cleared the temple as the Son of David to show the mercy which God desired and offered. In Luke, Jesus cleared the temple as the Glory of God to fill it with his presence. In John, Jesus cleared the temple as the Son of God to point to himself as the fulfillment of the temple.

A truly integrated reading

In this thesis, we have taken Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John individually and integrated their respective presentations of the temple demonstration in the wider context of each Gospel. This allowed us to see the nuances of the temple event particular to each Gospel. But for a truly integrated reading, we must remember that our New Testament has canonized not one but four Gospels. And we must hold each Gospel's account of the temple controversy in dynamic tension with the others.

If we limit our interpretation of Jesus' temple act to only the Markan or the Johannine account, we might arrive at a Jesus who is anti-Jewish or supercessionist, a Jesus who

¹¹³Craig A. Evans, "Jesus and the 'Cave of Robbers': Toward a Jewish Context for the Temple Action," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 3 (1993): 106.

proclaims that the Jewish conceptions of space and time and kingdom are ended, a Jesus who replaces core beliefs of the Jews with himself.¹¹⁴ We must balance this Jesus with the portraits painted by Matthew (which, ironically, is unfairly caricatured as the anti-Semitic Gospel) and Luke (often seen simply as a Gospel of the Gentiles). For Matthew, Jesus is the Son of David who, as testified by Luke, continues God's promise to his covenanted people. If we only had the Markan Jesus expelling buyers and sellers or the Johannine Jesus wielding his whip, our image of Jesus would be impoverished. Matthew's healing Jesus and Luke's teaching Jesus performing his characteristic acts in the temple precincts make our view of Jesus richer and rounder. On the other hand, if we only had Matthew or Luke, we would not have a strong image of the community of disciples as the new temple – an image built by Mark in his interpretation of the withered fig tree and established by John in his mentions of “springs of living water” and “many dwelling places.”

Ulrich Luz, writing on effective history and the history of effects, holds:

there was never an interpretation of a text that did not bear the mark of the historical situation of its interpreter. Interpretations change because situations and interpreters change... The understanding of a text even today means something different for different people in different situations, for example, men and women, workers and professors, Africans, Americans, and Europeans. The attempt to understand a biblical text always includes a stable element, namely, the text itself, and a variable element, namely, the interpreter and his or her situation. This view is not to be lamented but seen as necessary for understanding.¹¹⁵

For a truly integrated reading, we must situate the temple controversy not only in the wider context of each Gospel nor of just the four Gospels. We must also integrate it with the

¹¹⁴We can point out other passages in each Gospel to contradict this and show that Jesus was only against a particular faction of the Jews, but for the moment, let us only focus on the temple controversy.

¹¹⁵Ulrich Luz, *Matthew in History: Interpretation, Influence, and Effects* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 26.

events of our time. Just as these events can color our interpretation of the temple controversy, the temple controversy can affect our understanding of these events.

The new and John

Our generation saw the transition from snail mail to e-mail. But for the youth today, messaging through social media networks and via smart phones is the preferred mode of communication. Facebook posts, tweets, and texts are the new e-mail. Personal computers revolutionized the way people worked and entertained themselves in the 1980s. But as evidenced by declining sales, the PC has been replaced. The tablet is the new PC. These are but a few examples of a type of sea change that has affected people's lives and demanded appropriate responses at the risk of being left behind. In a much more profound way, Jesus also effected a sea change when he came to establish the kingdom of God. He became the new dwelling place of God, the New Temple, demanding, too, a new response from us.

Pope Francis and Matthew

It was during the writing of this thesis that Pope Francis was announced as the new Bishop of Rome. But his "take over" of the Vatican and the Church was not accomplished by cardinals electing him or by his name being read out loud to the multitude in St. Peter's Square and the millions watching on television. He captured the hearts of the faithful when he asked for the people's blessing, when he broke security protocol and kissed a child afflicted with cerebral palsy, and when he washed the feet of prisoners. Images of these and many other simple acts of humility and kindness that flooded the Internet made Christians hail their new leader. In the same way, the Matthean Jesus, the Son of David, took over Jerusalem and the temple not with force but with his healing mercy.

The Occupy Movement and Luke

The Occupy Wall Street Movement in 2011 was born out of a situation of great social inequality. The 99% had so little while the 1% held most of America's wealth. When people occupied Zuccotti Park, it was a statement about who should really own New York – not the elite, but the majority. As people stood their ground in Zuccotti Park, they held posters that said, "Welcome to Liberty Plaza Park." That was the original name of Zuccotti Park and a great symbol for returning to how things were and how they should be. When the Lukan Jesus "occupied" the temple and taught there, he was also making a statement about who really owned the temple. By filling the temple again with the presence of God, he was also showing what the temple was originally intended to be.

9/11 and Mark

Minoru Yamasaki, the architect of the twin towers of the World Trade Center, envisioned his ill-fated design thus:

World trade means world peace, and consequently the World Trade Center buildings in New York... had a bigger purpose than just to provide room for tenants. The World Trade Center is a living symbol of man's dedication to world peace... beyond the compelling need to make this a monument to world peace, the World Trade Center should, because of its importance, become a representation of man's belief in humanity, his need for individual dignity, his beliefs in the cooperation of men, and through cooperation, his ability to find greatness.¹¹⁶

The World Trade Center was not just office space. When two airplanes crashed into the twin towers and brought them down, it was not just private property or commerce or

¹¹⁶Quoted by Valerie Davis Benton in *Greater Heights* (Bloomington, IN: WestBow Press, 2011), 34.

individual lives that were attacked. America was stabbed at the heart, and as many journalists have written, the world was forever changed after 9/11.

In the same way, when the Markan Jesus demonstrated in the temple, he was attacking not just a building but a whole way of life. He was symbolically ending a conception of the world that the Jews held sacred; everything was about to be changed. This is not to say that Jesus Christ was a terrorist, but he did terrify those who wanted to hold on to the old age. And he was killed for it. 9/11 instilled fear and panic and paranoia among some people, but it also opened the eyes of others and unified them. Jesus' actions had the same effects.

The parable of the temple controversy

The temple controversy is a parable – not in the sense that it is just a story told by Jesus to illustrate a point, but in the sense that it invites us to go deeper into it, into what is happening around us, and into what God is doing in our world. We must always try to connect the parable to our lives, let it illuminate our experiences as our own experiences shed more light on it as well. And just like with parables, the test of how good an interpretation is lies in how much fruit it yields – thirty, sixty, or a hundredfold.

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