

# **A Survey and Analysis of Scholarly Views Regarding Jesus' Objections and Intent in the Temple Action**

By  
Glyn R.G. Norman

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
MA Degree in  
Aspects and Implications of Biblical Interpretation

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### **Abstract**

Jesus' Temple Action has perplexed scholars for centuries. Behind the actions which are straightforwardly described in the Gospels, stand the questions of offence and intention. What exactly was it that offended Jesus? Was it an issue of purity? Was it about the location of the commerce? Was he offended by the use of Tyrian coinage? And who was behind the offence? Was his issue with the merchants, the priests, the temple establishment or the Jewish religious leadership as a whole including the Pharisees? And what was Jesus' intention? Though most Bibles and commentaries entitle this action "The Cleansing of the Temple," was Jesus actually trying to "cleanse" the Temple or symbolically prophesy its doom or both? In terms of eschatology, has the Temple, in Jesus' view, already failed to be the long-awaited eschatological Temple, and it is against that he rails? Or are his portents of destruction a preparation for this eschatological Temple?

The scholarly options regarding the possible interpretations of offence and intention will be examined and assessed in detail, against a schema from Klyne Snodgrass.

It will be argued that Jesus' protest was primarily against the commercialization of the Temple, not only as offensive in itself, but because of its disproportionately negative effect on the poor. Not only that, but his actions and warnings, taken in context, and as presented by the Gospel writers, do indeed portend the coming destruction of the Temple as Jesus will soon replace many of its functions.

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## 1. Introduction

Jesus' Temple Action has perplexed scholars for centuries. Behind the actions which are straightforwardly described in the Gospels, stand the questions of offence and intention. What exactly was it that offended Jesus? Was it an issue of purity? Was it about the location of the commerce? Was he offended by the use of Tyrian coinage? And who was behind the offence? Was his issue with the merchants, the priests, the temple establishment or the Jewish religious leadership as a whole including the Pharisees? And what was Jesus' intention? Though most Bibles and commentaries entitle this action "The Cleansing of the Temple," was Jesus actually trying to "cleanse" the Temple or symbolically prophesy its doom or both? In terms of eschatology, has the Temple, in Jesus' view, already failed to be the long-awaited eschatological Temple, and it is against that he rails? Or are his portents of destruction a preparation for this eschatological Temple?

It will be argued that Jesus' protest was primarily against the commercialization of the Temple, not only as offensive in itself, but because of its disproportionately negative effect on the poor. Not only that, but his actions and warnings, taken in context, and as presented by the Gospel writers, do indeed portend the coming destruction of the Temple as Jesus will soon replace many of its functions.

The options regarding the possible interpretations of offence and intention will be examined in detail below, but first must be considered Jewish popular opinion regarding the Temple. Was Jesus' Action a reflection of an opinion regarding the Temple that was widely held by the Jewish population at large, or is he idiosyncratic in his protest?

## 2. Jewish Popular Opinion Concerning the Temple

It is established historically that the Temple was held in poor regard by the Essenes and Qumran sect.<sup>1</sup> The latter's reaction to the Temple's perceived corruption was to withdraw to the desert and set up an alternative in the form of a strictly regimented community. Just as rabbinical Judaism later survived the lack of a Temple through intense devotion to the Law, so the Qumran community replaced the deficient Temple with their

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<sup>1</sup> Sanders distinguishes between two groups of Essenes: the Qumran group, separate and in the desert, and the other town-dwelling group who had less strict rules. The Qumran group is a sect, because it does not participate in the Temple; the CD (Damascus Covenant) group did attend the Temple, though they disapproved of certain aspects, such as the calendar that it worked to. E.P Sanders, *Judaism, Practice and Belief*, 63B CE-66 CE (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2016) 362-63.

structured community and its associated rules.<sup>2</sup> Devotion and piety must find their place, and if the Temple is not worthy, then another channel must be found, in this case through the community, though without a sacrificial cult.<sup>3</sup> This alternative piety was also accompanied by an increased interest in the future, heavenly, eschatological Temple, though this did not obviate their desire to purify and reconsecrate the earthly one. Gärtner points out the mixed feelings toward the Temple:

It is not surprising that we encounter texts which on the one hand criticize sharply the institution of the Temple, and on the other have a great deal of positive comment to make on the sacrificial office and the Temple cultus. We thus find expressions of considerable interest in what took place in the Temple and its cultus; further, we find a positive attitude to the Temple priests in Jerusalem in the midst of all the criticism. Mention is also made of the various kinds of sacrifice, which belonged in the context of Temple worship. But at the same time serious accusations are made against those who served in the Temple (C.D. iv. 18ff., 1QpHab ix. 4f., xi. 12ff.), to the effect that they profaned the Temple (1 QpHab xii. 9, cf. Ps. Sol. viii. 10ff.), and failed to observe the Law and its regulations for service in the Temple (C.D. v. 6f., vi. 12f.). ...But at the end of the evil age through which the world was then passing, the Temple cultus would once more be set up in all its majesty; then the precepts of the Law would be followed, and the sacrifice would be pure and pleasing to God. It is this kind of positive attitude which, it has been suggested, forms the background to texts like C.D. xvi. 13, 1QS ix. 4f., 1QM ii. 5-6 and the Aramaic fragment from Cave 2 which is said to describe the heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup>

This opposition and dissatisfaction was wider than the Qumran community however.

Turner describes it thus:

Among the more thoughtful and historically minded there was an understandable dissatisfaction with the second Temple both on account of its poverty of structure and its chequered history. Some rabbis said that the presence of Yahweh had never returned to the sanctuary after the exile, or that it lacked five things, such as the ark, the urim and thummim, the fire from heaven, the Shekinah or presence, and the holy Spirit. Others such as the Qumran community, felt that the desecration by Antiochus Epiphanes' heathen sacrifices upon the altar in 168 B.C. had never been removed, and the present Temple and priesthood had not been restored to full holiness.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, this statement does beg the question of whether the common people, the *am ha'aretz* were among the 'thoughtful and historically minded.' I would suggest however that the thoughtful and historically conscious could equally have approved of the Temple, wrested as it was by the Hasmoneans from the hands of the defiling heathen. From this

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<sup>2</sup> 'Their attempt to re-establish the true Israel by means of a perfect submission to the law was, as they saw it, aimed at the creation of those conditions on which Israel might be raised from humiliation and set on the road to final victory.' Bertil Gärtner, *The Temple and The Community in Qumran and the New Testament*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1965) 13.

<sup>3</sup> Donald Juel, *Messiah and Temple: the trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Missoula, Scholars Press/Society of Biblical Literature, 1977)165.

<sup>4</sup> Gärtner, *The Temple and The Community...* 19-20. Cf. Harold W. Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: the phenomenology and theology of places of worship* (The Hague, Mouton, 1979) 67: '...the spiritually minded Qumran members and many writers among the non-canonical books developed a strong interest in the heavenly Temple of God, and then identified this with the long-hoped-for new perfected Temple in Jerusalem. The heavenly Temple must therefore descend to earth when God once again returned to dwell amidst his people more intimately and clearly than ever before.'

<sup>5</sup> Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House*, 67.

perspective, the Temple could have been seen as a trophy of war and viewed much more positively. We must look elsewhere for proof positive.

Evans suggests that the Temple had a history of greed and corruption and that there is ample evidence to support this.<sup>6</sup> N.T. Wright concurs, pointing out that one of the first actions of the revolutionaries when they took the Temple at the beginning of the war was to burn the record of debts:

...there was also a more popular critique. The poorer classes evidently regarded the Temple as symbolizing the oppression they suffered at the hands of the rich elite... The unpopularity of the ruling class at this time is well documented, and the widespread dislike of them meant that the first-century Temple, and particularly the way in which it was being run, came in for regular criticism.<sup>7</sup>

However, the Temple was obviously well-attended and while the populace may have grumbled, it may have merely been the usual low level of complaint about any social system that requires money of its citizens, even in the form of a type of religious taxation.

Evans and Wright posit a general unrest and dissatisfaction of the populace against the Temple, based partly on a perception of greed and corruption among the high priests. Against this must be placed Sanders' claim, that the priesthood had an interest in keeping the price of sacrifices low in order to encourage proper observance of the required offerings.<sup>8</sup>

As mentioned above, the early Christians continued to attend the Temple apparently without seeing it as contradictory to their own belief in Jesus. The impetus for the abandonment of the Temple by Christians seems to have come from the Temple authorities, rather than from a realization of the Temple's true corrupt state by the Christians themselves. Barrett finds both positive and negative attitudes towards the Temple in the book of Acts:

There are passages in Acts that assume that Jewish Christians will naturally continue to use the Temple as they did in their pre-Christian lives. Not only is the Temple a proper place in which to meet for religious discourse and prayer, the old sacrificial system continues in use, and that even by Paul. People take vows, and the vows must be discharged in the proper form.<sup>9</sup>

Included also in Acts is the clear implication of Stephen that the Temple has turned into something akin to an idol for the Jews, and that they are incapable of seeing God's revelation anywhere other than in Temple, Law and Land.<sup>10</sup> In the book of Hebrews, the word "tabernacle" is mentioned eight times, and the word "Temple" not at all, perhaps

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<sup>6</sup> Craig A. Evans, 'Jesus' Action in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction?', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 51, 1989, 269-70.

<sup>7</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1992), 412.

<sup>8</sup> Sanders, *Judaism, Practice and Belief*, 91.

<sup>9</sup> C.K. Barrett, 'Attitudes to the Temple in the Acts of the Apostles,' in William Horbury (ed.), *Templum Amicitiae, Essays on the Second Temple presented to Ernst Bammel*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 48 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 345-367 citing 364-65.

<sup>10</sup> Acts 7:48-49.

signifying the diminishing importance of the temple to early Christians, even prior to its destruction. Paul in his speech to the Areopagus affirms that God does not live in temples ‘built by hands.’<sup>11</sup> Both the positive and the negative are recorded; “The two lines of thought lie side by side, and no attempt is made to reconcile them.”<sup>12</sup>

This brings us to an obvious point. If Jesus were so clearly anti-Temple, *per se*, or so convinced of its leaders’ corruption, then his followers would have been unlikely to maintain their Temple attendance. They were able to both witness his Temple Action, and continue to attend the Temple. This suggests that Jesus’ Action was a typical Jewish ‘critique from within’ which did not invalidate the Temple itself, but called its leaders to bring it to its high calling, devoid of distractions.

Sanders is of the view that the Temple was not seen as corrupt by the ordinary people. Both Philo and Josephus report Jewish support for all aspects of Temple worship, including offerings sent from the Diaspora.<sup>13</sup> Sanders gives examples of the common piety toward the Temple in Luke, chapters one and two:

Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, is a pious priest; Mary and Joseph devoutly bring the required offering after childbirth; Anna and Simeon frequent the Temple for the purpose of worship. Luke ... captured the air of devotion around the Temple.

The description that has just been given is generally true: most Jews regarded the service of the Temple, including the requirements to make offerings and sacrifices, as sacred, and they respected the hereditary priesthood.<sup>14</sup>

There are also examples in the Gospels and Acts of the common people, and the Pharisees, objecting to perceived violations of Temple protocol. Such protests indicate a reverence for the Temple rather than a view of it as corrupt. In Mark’s Gospel, the trial sequence of Jesus includes testimony from false witnesses that he had spoken against the Temple,<sup>15</sup> and mockery from those who claimed that he had said that he was going to destroy it.<sup>16</sup> In Acts, Paul is arrested because some Jews from the province of Asia cause the crowd to believe that Paul had brought Gentiles into the Temple area.<sup>17</sup> Such actions imply a populace that holds the Temple and its protocols to be sacred, and wishes severe penalties for those who transgress or speak against it.

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<sup>11</sup> Acts 17:24.

<sup>12</sup> Barrett, ‘Attitudes to the Temple’ 365.

<sup>13</sup> Though Sanders recognizes that Josephus as a priest, may have seen the Temple service ‘through rose coloured glasses.’ Sanders, *Judaism, Practice and Belief*, 53.

<sup>14</sup> Sanders, *Judaism, Practice and Belief*, 53. For further evidence of the generally favorable view of the Temple, see chapter 14.

<sup>15</sup> Mk 14:57-59.

<sup>16</sup> Mk 15:29.

<sup>17</sup> Acts 21:28-29.



Another consideration concerning the Temple is the employment that it offered to the surrounding population. Although the main part of construction of Herod's Temple began in 20/19 BC, and took about a decade, ongoing additional adornments continued right up until the Jewish revolt in A.D. 66. This construction project provided employment and therefore livelihood for a good number of people, and that would have created a more positive attitude towards the Temple, even if it was viewed as flawed.<sup>18</sup> The care demonstrated in the construction of the temple, to the extent that experienced stonemasons trained priests in the necessary skills so that they could perform the necessary stonemasonry in the areas only priests could go, suggests an attitude of continued reverence.

So, some scholars think the people saw the Temple as corrupt, and others do not. How should we respond? In view of all of this evidence, it seems likely that the attitude to the Temple was somewhat mixed. While valued as an institution, various priesthoods during its history had come under condemnation and question of their fitness for office. This is perhaps a situation akin to the view of democracy in the United States. While there will always be corrupt politicians and controversy over election procedures, and special interest financing, still democracy is valued as a political system. The existence of a few 'bad apples' does not necessarily bring the whole structure into question. In fact, one would be hard pressed to find a time when the priesthood of the Temple was not under criticism from one group or another. It seems the fate of those in power that there will always be mumblings of discontent against them. Jesus' protest is a particularly sharp one, but still it is within the general category of the typical Jewish 'critique from within.' Unlike the other prophets, he perhaps has a clearer sense of the limited life remaining to the Temple, but this is not due to failures any greater than those of the past, but more connected with eschatological obsolescence.

### **3. The Temple in the Primary Literature (Gospels)**

Before considering the Temple Action in detail, it is important to establish how the Temple is generally presented in the Gospels. Though the Temple Action may be hugely significant in revealing what Jesus thought about the Temple, the Gospel writers present additional material on the Temple, which is not wholly negative. The following is a brief survey of relevant mentions of the Temple in the Gospels. Where the Gospels appear to be describing the same event, this will be noted with an = sign.

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<sup>18</sup> M.O. Wise, "Temple," in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IVP, 1992) 811-817; 812.

- Jesus is presented in the Temple by his parents, and prophesied over by Simeon and Anna (Lk 2:22, 27, 37)
- Jesus, at 12 years old, is found in the Temple, debating with the teachers (Lk 2:46)
- Jesus is to be found regularly teaching in the Temple (Mt 21:23, 24:55; Mk 12:35, 14:49; Lk 19:47, 20:1, 21:37-38, Jn 7:14, 7:28, 8:2, 8:20, 10:22f., 18:20)
- Jesus says that “something greater than the Temple is here” (Mt 12:5-7)
- Jesus and his disciples pay the Temple tax (Mt 17:24-25)
- Jesus heals people within the Temple grounds and receives the accolades of the people who shout “Hosanna to the Son of David” (Mt 21:14-15)
- The authority of Jesus is questioned in the Temple by the chief priests and elders (Mt 21:23; Mk 11:27; 12:35; Lk 20:1)
- Jesus comments on a widow’s offering in the Temple (Mk 12:41=Lk 21:1)<sup>19</sup>
- “Swearing by the Temple” seems to be viewed as an authentic method of demonstrating the seriousness of a person’s oath (Mt 23:21).
- Jesus tells a parable where a tax collector is made right before God in the Temple (Lk 18:10)
- Jesus challenges the teachers of the law and Pharisees regarding swearing by the Temple and making oaths (Mt 23:15-22)
- Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple after the disciples admire it (Mt 24:1-2=Mk 13:1-2=Lk 21:5)
- The Temple guard are complicit in the plans, and event of, Jesus’ arrest (Lk 22:4, 52-53; Jn 7:32, 45-47)
- Witnesses come forward and claim that Jesus said, “I am able to destroy the Temple of God and rebuild it in three days.” (Mt 26:61=Mark 14:58; but cf. Jn 2:19 where John records Jesus saying this, but explains that Jesus was talking about his body rather than the Jerusalem Temple). Although these are false witnesses, this still provides good evidence that the High Priest values the Temple, and would find such a claim heinous.
- While Jesus is on the cross, people shout “You who are going to destroy the Temple and build it in three days, save yourself!” (Mt 27:40=Mark 15:29) Admittedly, this is somewhat ambiguous since the objection is to Jesus not following through on his (purported) threat, rather than unequivocal evidence of their love of the Temple.

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<sup>19</sup> This story is more significant than it appears and will be discussed in detail below.

- The curtain of the Temple is torn in two at the point of Jesus' death (Mt 27:51=Mk 15:38=Lk 23:45)
- After Jesus' resurrection appearances, the disciples "stayed continually at the Temple, praising God." (Lk 24:53)

From this brief survey, the following tentative conclusions can be drawn from how the Gospel writers present the Temple:

- (i) The Temple at the time of Jesus' birth is viewed as sufficiently legitimate that his parents follow the usual protocol of presenting him there, where the pious (Anna and Simeon) are still to be found
- (ii) Jesus teaches and heals, apparently often, at the Temple, which implies he does not see it as so terribly compromised and corrupt that he would not grace it with his presence, though it should be said that Jesus evinces incredible tolerance and grace in the midst of the sinful and corrupt so this may not be a clinching argument.
- (iii) Jesus and his disciples pay the Temple tax, and so are compliant with this aspect, at least, of the Temple's requirements, and prepared to justify this action.<sup>20</sup>
- (iv) The Temple is still viewed as a place where God's presence can be experienced, where oaths can be legitimated, and where someone can get right with God.

However, there are hints of dissatisfaction and a foreshadowing of the Temple Action:

- i) Jesus says that "something greater than the Temple is here" (Mt 12:5-7)
- ii) Jesus conflicts frequently with the chief priests, teachers of the law and Pharisees at the Temple
- iii) Jesus makes some statements that the Temple will be destroyed, and apparently, in some cases, that he will be the one doing the destroying

#### **4. The Temple Action**

The Temple Action by Jesus is one of the most confusing to understand. Not only is it open to debate what he was trying to achieve through the action, but also what exactly he was protesting against. Snodgrass helpfully summarizes the main possibilities:

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<sup>20</sup> Though with the caveat that the true "children" should be exempt (Mt 17:24-26a), and note comments below in Section 5.6.2 about the widow giving her last money to the temple. Jesus does not prevent it, but neither does he necessarily praise it.

1. Jesus' act was an over-confident attempt to start a revolution, but people did not follow him. He failed as a world deliverer, and the Gospels have de-emphasized his violence and his goal.
2. With this act Jesus objected to any distinction between profane and holy.
3. This was a symbolic act pointing to the coming destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple. Usually assumed with this position is that destruction is preparation for rebuilding.
4. Jesus' act was an attack on the sacrificial system itself and, therefore, meant the cessation of sacrifice.
5. Jesus' act was an objection to Herod's turning the extended Temple Mount into a Civic Center. Jesus sought to extend the holiness of the inner court to the outer court.
6. The incident is a cleansing of commercialism and corruption. This could include reaction against the offensive Tyrian coins. For some the cleansing is so that the Gentiles may have a proper place to worship, but most scholars holding this view would not emphasize Gentile worship.
7. The action was a prophetic protest that pointed to future eschatological hope. Often this approach emphasizes the expectation that the Messiah would be a Temple builder.<sup>21</sup>

Items 1 and 2 are very minority view interpretations and few commentators give them serious consideration.<sup>22</sup> Items 3 to 7 are more serious contenders and will be discussed in detail in the relevant sections below. Since Mark is likely the source for both Matthew and Luke's accounts, assuming Markan priority, the commentary on Mark will be more substantial.

#### **4.1 Mark (11:15-17)**

In the Gospel of Mark, the story of the Temple Action (Mark 11:15-17)<sup>23</sup> is located in the centre of a two-part story where Jesus curses a fig tree (11:12-14; 20:21). Commentators view this as deliberate redaction by Mark to give an interpretive frame to the Temple Action, (this will be discussed more fully below) usually with the implication that Mark intends the reader to understand that just as the fig tree was destroyed in judgment, the same fate will

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<sup>21</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, "The Temple Incident," pp. 429-480 in Darrell Bock & Robert Webb (ed.), *Key Events in the life of the historical Jesus: a collaborative exploration of context and coherence* (Tübingen, Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 463-464.

<sup>22</sup> For Snodgrass' assessment of these two options, see Snodgrass, "The Temple Incident," 443-444.

<sup>23</sup> For perspectives on whether the Temple Action and Jesus' saying in v17 should be viewed as one unit, see Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20, Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville, Nelson, 2008) 164-165.

befall the Temple.<sup>24</sup> The historicity of the Temple Action has also been questioned with doubts raised about whether Jesus could have successfully carried out such an action with the presence of Temple police and Roman authorities.<sup>25</sup> This scepticism can be largely allayed by understanding the action as limited in scope, and primarily symbolic in nature, rather than massively disruptive.<sup>26</sup> The criterion of multiple attestation is relevant here, since the Temple Action appears in all four Gospels, albeit on a different timeline in John.

<sup>15</sup> On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the Temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves,

Of note is the fact that Jesus drove out both those who were selling *and* buying. If he were simply upset at price gouging by the sellers, we would expect his wrath to be so directed, but he drives out those who intend to buy also, seeming to imply that the whole commercial enterprise is abhorrent to him, which is also borne out by v16. The tables of the money changers and dove sellers are overturned. Money changing was necessary because only certain coins (Tyrian) were acceptable for payment of the Temple tax,<sup>27</sup> and dove sellers provided an essential service for those needing to sacrifice, as these doves would have been certified as unblemished, which the Temple authorities required. If one possessed doves at home, common practice would be to sell the doves locally, and buy new ones at the Temple, where one could be confident that they met the required standard.

<sup>16</sup> and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the Temple courts.

The Greek word here used for “merchandise” is more accurately translated as vessel, but the reasons behind Jesus’ prohibition are unclear. It could be that Jesus is looking forward to the time of an ideal Temple prophesied by Zechariah 14:20-21 when traders will no longer be

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<sup>24</sup> Not all commentators view the cursing of the fig tree as historical. Meier sees it as the construction of a pre-Markan source. See John Paul Meier, *A Marginal Jew -Volume 2*, (New York/New Haven, Doubleday, 1993), 891-892.

<sup>25</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20, Word Biblical Commentary*, 165-166, mentioning Haenchen, Lohmeyer, Grundmann, Schmitals *et al*, who have doubts about the historicity of this event. See also Jostein Ådna, “Jesus and the Temple,” in Tom Holmen, Stanley E. Porter (ed.) *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, Volume 3 (Leiden, Boston, Brill, 2011); 2639 FN9 for a more extensive list.

<sup>26</sup> A view also held by Ådna, “Jesus and the Temple,” 2640 and 2643 where he advocates for a “literary-critical and a tradition-critical analysis” to establish historicity.

<sup>27</sup> Though it is possible that the moneychangers were charging exorbitant exchange rates which could partly explain the “den of robbers” comment. Walter Wessell, “Mark”, in ed. Frank Gæbelein, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Vol 8 Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1984) 727.

present in the Temple.<sup>28</sup> Josephus comments, “Nothing of the nature of food or drink is brought within the Temple; objects of this kind may not even be offered on the altar, save for those which are prepared for the sacrifices.” (*Ag. Ap.* 2.8 §§106, 109).<sup>29</sup> A definitive answer is elusive. What is clear is that certain types of behavior in the Temple offended Jesus, and the commercial activities bore the brunt of his anger.

<sup>17</sup> And as he taught them, he said, “Is it not written: ‘My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations’? But you have made it ‘a den of robbers.’”

Jesus is here combining two Old Testament quotations, the first from the last part of Isaiah 56:7, and the second from the first part of Jeremiah 7:11. For context, here is the complete passage from Isaiah:

And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD  
to minister to him,  
to love the name of the LORD,  
and to be his servants,  
all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it  
and who hold fast to my covenant—  
<sup>7</sup> these I will bring to my holy mountain  
and give them joy in my house of prayer.  
Their burnt offerings and sacrifices  
will be accepted on my altar;  
for my house will be called  
a house of prayer for all nations.” (Isa 56:6-7)

The emphasis of the passage in Isaiah is that foreigners (Gentiles) will be included in worship of the Lord, in his Temple, and this no doubt is what prompts many commentators to believe that the use of the Outer Court for commerce, hindering the worship of Gentiles (the only place they could access in the Temple) is the cause of Jesus’ ire. The passage from Jeremiah 7:11 reads thus:

<sup>11</sup> Has this house, which bears my Name, become a den of robbers to you? But I have been watching! declares the LORD.

Sanders believes this quotation in the mouth of Jesus is inauthentic, but Evans points out that he is missing the hyperbolic nature of prophetic language, and that Jeremiah too was using the language in this way. Josephus describes violence by ruling priests against junior priests, and Jesus himself tells a parable of priests as violent murderers in the very next chapter of Mark (12:1-12) so this language seems appropriate.<sup>30</sup> The fact that the Lord is

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<sup>28</sup> Though the word for “traders” can be translated differently as will be discussed below.

<sup>29</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20, Word Biblical Commentary*, 173.

<sup>30</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20, Word Biblical Commentary*, 175.

watching, potentially serves as a warning to the priests, though they do not react positively to Jesus' prophetic challenge.<sup>31</sup> The 'den of robbers' comment could be addressing the price inflation of the money changers and animal sellers, or it might, more poetically, imply that the Gentiles were being 'robbed' of a place of worship with the Outer Court being usurped for trade rather than worship.<sup>32</sup> Even if the price inflation were minimal, it might still be offensive to Jesus, that anyone would try to profit from the worshipful activities of others.

#### 4.2 *Matthew (21:12-13)*

Matthew's version of the Temple Action appears to clearly derive from Mark's, with five differences. Firstly, the cursing of the fig tree does not bracket the incident as it does in Mark, but rather appears as a single event the following day, with the tree withering immediately. This could, for sure, provide the same prophetic object lesson as in Mark, but it is less intentionally placed and connected to the Temple Action as in Mark's "sandwich."

Secondly, Matthew omits the comment about carrying merchandise through the Temple court, which is unique to Mark.

Third, Matthew omits the reference to the Gentiles/nations in the quotation from Isaiah 56:7, referring instead to "a house of prayer." This somewhat weakens the case that Jesus' primary concern was Gentile access for worship, though it could also reflect the *Sitz im Leben* of Matthew who wrote after the destruction of the Temple, and therefore saw that this messianic expectation could no longer be fulfilled at the Jerusalem Temple.<sup>33</sup>

Fourth, Matthew seems to attach more explicit messianic overtones to the action with references to Jesus' arriving on a colt and being greeted as the "Son of David" in v9 of this chapter, and with children shouting "Hosanna to the Son of David" immediately following the Temple Action in v15. Notable is the fact that Matthew records Jesus accepting this tribute and asking the chief priests and teachers of the law: "Have you never read? From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise" (v16). D.A. Carson interprets the possibility of fleecing the pilgrims, and defiling a potential place of Gentile worship with a marketplace atmosphere, as probable causes for Jesus' action.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20, Word Biblical Commentary*, 179.

<sup>32</sup> Wessell, "Mark" *Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol 8 Matthew, Mark, Luke*, 728.

<sup>33</sup> D.A. Carson, "Matthew", in ed. Frank Gæbelein, *Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol 8 Matthew, Mark, Luke* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1984) 441.

<sup>34</sup> Carson, "Matthew", *Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol 8 Matthew, Mark, Luke* 441.

The fifth element which is present in Matthew but absent in the other accounts, is the healing miracles that take place in v14 which prompts the opposition of the chief priests and teachers of the law. Again, this perhaps adds credibility to the messianic overtones Matthew seems to intend.

#### **4.3 Luke (19:45-46)**

Luke's version of the Temple Action, supposed also to derive from Mark's account, deviates in that, like Matthew, Luke places the Temple Action following an approach to Jerusalem, where Jesus is lauded as "the king who comes in the name of Lord" (19:38) riding on a colt, in messianic style. Before the Temple Action, Jesus pronounces a woe on Jerusalem, lamenting and weeping, "They will not leave one stone on another because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you" (19:44). The motif of "arriving king" is darkly coloured with the motif of impending rejection. The differences between Luke and Mark are slight. He does not include the cursing of the fig tree, perhaps because the notes of rejection (and impending judgment) have already been sounded in 19:44. Also, Luke has a parable of a barren fig tree earlier in his gospel (13:6-9). He may have been unsure if the parable was based on an actual historical event or not, and thus makes the editorial decision to present it as a story Jesus told, rather than an actual cursing of a fig tree. He notes Jesus driving out the sellers (but not the buyers) and, like Matthew, omits the reference to "the nations" in the Isaiah 56:7 quote. The opposition of the chief priests, teachers of the law and leaders is explicit in the following verses (19:47-48), together with their murderous intentions which are stymied by the crowds.

#### **4.4 John (2:13-17)**

The key difference between John's account, and that of the Synoptics, concerns the chronology. For John, Jesus' Temple Action occurs early in the Gospel and is Jesus' second public action whereas in the Synoptics, it occurs towards the end of Jesus' public ministry after the triumphal entry. In John's version, Jesus used a whip, and cattle and sheep are driven out in addition to the merchants. John does not use the Isaiah quote, nor the quote from Jeremiah, but does allude to Zechariah 14:21, with his comment that the people should not make "the house of my Father a house of business." John adds a comment that the



disciples later associated his action with Psalm 69:9, “Zeal for your house will consume me.”<sup>35</sup>

The difference in the chronology of the event can be explained either as Jesus cleansing the Temple twice (which most commentators think unlikely),<sup>36</sup> or as an editorial decision on the part of either the Synoptic writers, primarily Mark, or John.<sup>37</sup> In the Synoptics, the Temple Action being located where it is suggests that this deed was the proximate cause of Jesus’ arrest, trial and crucifixion. In John, it seems to be the public appearance of the “resurrected” Lazarus that causes the authorities to seek to kill Jesus. Wherever the incident is placed, it occasions the ire of the authorities (“chief priests and teachers of the law” in the Synoptics, and “the Jews” (John’s shorthand for those opposed to Jesus) in the Gospel of John and is almost certainly a strong part of the reason for their desire to be rid of Jesus.

## 5 To what is Jesus objecting?

As Snodgrass’ seven possibilities are considered,<sup>38</sup> two key questions will be asked:

- 1) Against what or whom, exactly, is Jesus protesting?
- 2) What is he hoping to achieve through this protest, if this the issue?

### 5.1 Revolution (Snodgrass #1)

For some, Jesus’ Temple Action is best interpreted as a failed attempt to start a revolution. Though it was significant in meaning, its scope was not sufficient to raise up the populace in revolution. The Gospels, written in hindsight, are keen to play this down and reduce any intimation that this was Jesus’ intent, prosecuted with violence.<sup>39</sup> In this reading, Jesus’ primary protest is against Rome and Jewish collaborators. Snodgrass, along with the vast majority of scholars do not consider this to be coherent with the Jesus otherwise presented in the Gospels, who seems to eschew violence.

Hardly anything else in Jesus’ statements or actions in any of the Gospels supports such a view, and a great deal contradicts it. The command to love one’s enemies hardly fits with violence and revolution against Rome.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Snodgrass, “The Temple Incident,” 443-444.

<sup>36</sup> As a typical example, Snodgrass, “The Temple Incident,” 445.

<sup>37</sup> Arguments for preferring the Johannine chronology are summarized here: Snodgrass, “The Temple Incident,” pp. 446f, though he still favours the Synoptic chronology.

<sup>38</sup> Though in a different order than Snodgrass, with the less convincing options presented first.

<sup>39</sup> Snodgrass references as representative scholars for this position: Charles H. Talbert, ed., *Reimarus: Fragments* (trans. Ralph S. Fraser; Lives of Jesus series; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 146-50 and S.G.F. Brandon, *Jesus and the Zealots: A Study of the Political Factor in Primitive Christianity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), 331-36.

<sup>40</sup> Snodgrass, “The Temple Incident,” 464.

Ernst Bammel provides an excellent survey of the scholars “from Reimarus to Brandon”<sup>41</sup> who have pursued this view that “Jesus activity is firmly rooted in the belligerent Jewish tradition,”<sup>42</sup> but finds it generally unconvincing, concluding that the authors’ interpretations of these events have more to do with their own social situation, “the voice of the day,”<sup>43</sup> rather than being rooted in a genuine historical reconstruction.

## 5.2 Removing the distinction between profane and holy (Snodgrass #2)

This view, primarily promoted by Marcus Borg, in his work, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus*,<sup>44</sup> suggests that through this Temple Action Jesus was removing any distinction between the profane and the holy, and that his target is the priests who perpetuate such a distinction. The logical fallacy in this argument is that Jesus clearly feels that there is something special about the Temple, contrary to Borg’s view. One would hardly institute actions and words addressing inappropriate behavior in the Temple, if one were not concerned about holiness and propriety there. Although Jesus’ opinion concerning purity was different than the Pharisees for example (Matt 8:1-8; 18-26; 15:10-20), his protest demonstrates that certain actions are defiling the Temple and subverting it.<sup>45</sup>

## 5.3 Herodian Rule and Protest against his Innovation (#5)

Hans Dieter Betz provides an alternative interpretation to Jesus’ action seeing it primarily as a protest against Herodian rule.<sup>46</sup> The antipathy between Jesus and the Herodians is well established in the Gospels, with Herod being responsible for the death of John the Baptist, Jesus calling Herod “fox,” (Lk 13:31-33) and the Herodians trying to trap Jesus with questions about paying taxes to Caesar (Mark 12:13-17).<sup>47</sup> In Betz’ view, Herod was attempting to consolidate his power (both economic and political), and legitimate his rule by using a Temple and sacrifices, just as Roman emperors did. It is against this shameless usage of the Temple that Jesus protests.<sup>48</sup> N.T. Wright agrees that the Temple did serve a political function, and that “Herod’s grandiose rebuilding of the Temple formed a crucial element in

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<sup>41</sup> Ernst Bammel, “The revolution theory from Reimarus to Brandon,” in ed. Ernst Bammel, C.F.D. Moule, *Jesus and the Politics of his Day* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984), 11-68.

<sup>42</sup> Bammel, “The revolution theory...,” 12.

<sup>43</sup> Bammel, “The revolution theory...,” 68.

<sup>44</sup> Marcus Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (New York, E. Mellen, 1984)

<sup>45</sup> Snodgrass, “The Temple Incident,” 465.

<sup>46</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, “Jesus and the Purity of the Temple (Mark 11:15-18); A Comparative Religion Approach,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116/3, 1997, 455-472.

<sup>47</sup> Betz, “Jesus and the Purity of the Temple...,” 469.

<sup>48</sup> Betz, “Jesus and the Purity of the Temple...,” 469.

his claim to be king of the Jews<sup>49</sup> and a part of his plan to establish his own dynasty. It seems more likely that rather than Jesus' protest being against the attempt by Herod to legitimate his rule through the Temple, it was his recent reconstruction "turning the extended temple mount into a civic center and an attempt to extend the holiness of the inner court to the outer court,"<sup>50</sup> and the concomitant commercialism and corruption it enabled that was more of an issue.

#### 5.4 An Action of Cleansing against the Corruption of the Priesthood (Snodgrass #6)

Sanders, in *Jesus and Judaism*,<sup>51</sup> makes a strong case for interpreting the Temple Action as nothing less than a portent of destruction. However, he seems to have made a hermeneutical decision, along the lines of confirmation bias, to ignore any data that might point towards a "cleansing." Sanders argues that we do not find criticism of the priesthood elsewhere in the gospels to which Evans retorts:

I think that Sander's conclusion that there is no authentic tradition that suggests Jesus was critical of the priesthood has not fairly taken into account passages that give indications, usually indirect, of controversy and animosity between Jesus and the priests. This evidence would suggest that Jesus' attack on the integrity of the priesthood as seen in the Temple cleansing is not without reasonable context.<sup>52</sup>

In Evan's view, Sanders has taken a too-binary view of the event, concluding that it must be one or the other, either a portent of destruction or a cleansing. Sanders' hermeneutical decision, for traditional-critical reasons, is to suggest that the gospel writers, out of embarrassment, have reinterpreted Jesus' action as a cleansing to de-emphasize a possibly militant interpretation of Jesus' behaviour. Evans points out that if they truly wished to do this, they could have omitted Jesus' prophecy concerning the Temple's destruction also.<sup>53</sup> For Evans, the action has components of both cleansing and destruction. The Temple Action can serve both as a cleansing and a warning, that if the corruption is not addressed, judgment and destruction will follow.<sup>54</sup> Evans does acknowledge that the Temple destruction theme is present in other places, for example, in the parable of the wicked vineyard tenants

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<sup>49</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1992) 406-7; 483.

<sup>50</sup> Snodgrass, "The Temple Incident," 468.

<sup>51</sup> Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, particularly ch. 1 (61-76) "Jesus and the Temple."

<sup>52</sup> Craig A. Evans, "Jesus' Action in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction?", *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 51:2 (April 1989) 237-270; 248.

<sup>53</sup> Evans, "Jesus' Action..." 238.

<sup>54</sup> Evans, "Jesus' Action..." 249.

(Mark 12:1-12), Jesus' prophecies concerning the destruction of the Temple and adjacent buildings, and more.<sup>55</sup>

#### 5.4.1 The Exclusion of the Gentiles

One of the more traditional arguments in favour of 'cleansing' is that the siting of the marketplace inhibited those who would otherwise be able to use it for devotional purposes (part of Snodgrass' #6 possibility). Gentiles were only permitted to pray in the Outer Court, and if that court was a cacophony of marketplace trading, it would have a deleterious effect on the attempted piety of the gathered Gentile worshippers. The Synoptic Gospels all cite Jesus quoting Isaiah 56:7: "My house will be called a house of prayer" suggesting possibly that the spiritual tone and purpose of the whole Temple was being compromised but Mark completes the quote with the addition of "for all nations" perhaps precisely because it was the Gentiles who were being most affected by the trade in the outer courts.<sup>56</sup> Lupieri comments, "...the sin of Israel in our present context is the exclusion of the Gentiles"<sup>57</sup> whose ability to worship is "torpedoed."<sup>58</sup>

It seems as though this trade in the Outer Courts was a recent development resulting from Herod's remodeling of the Temple, which expanded the use of the Outer Courtyard to a civic space resembling a Greek marketplace or Roman forum. According to Lane, this permission for commerce to be allowed within the Temple was an innovation by Caiaphas in AD 30, in preference to markets outside on the Mount of Olives.<sup>59</sup> So, a combination of Herod's remodeling, and Caiaphas' permission, allowed commercial activities previously prohibited to take place in this area. Rather than being a space devoted to prayer, instead its purpose has been subverted for less spiritual activities such as trade, money changing and the selling of doves.<sup>60</sup>

Against this though, stands the fact that Matthew and Luke do not add the phrase "for all nations" which, if the exclusion of the Gentiles was the primary offence, would be

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<sup>55</sup> For a comprehensive list, see Evans, "Jesus' Action..." 240-241.

<sup>56</sup> William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publ., 1974) 406.

<sup>57</sup> Edmondo Lupieri, "Fragments of the Historical Jesus? A Reading of Mark 11, 11-[26]", *Annali di storia dell'esegesi (ASE)* 28/1 (2011) 289-311; 294. See also, Wessell, "Mark", *Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol 8 Matthew, Mark, Luke*, 728, and William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 406.

<sup>58</sup> Andreas Kostenberger, *Encountering John: the Gospel in historical, literary and theological perspective* (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 1999), 75-76. Jeremias has a slight variant on this position, claiming that as part of the "eschatological moment" Jesus is preparing a place of worship for the Gentiles. Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus' Promise to the Nations*, (London, SCM, 1958) 65-66.

<sup>59</sup> Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 404

<sup>60</sup> Adela Yarbro Collins, Harold W. Attridge *Mark: A Commentary*, (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2007), 527-8.

important. Also, during this time period, this area of the Temple was not known as “The Court of the Gentiles”<sup>61</sup> so the concept of Gentile exclusion would not have been so stark even if it were present. It is true that archeologists have found two tablets from the Roman era warning Gentiles not to proceed further on pain of death,<sup>62</sup> but this ban does not prove that there was discrete alternative area designated for their use, although many commentators assume this to be the case. In the Book of Acts, where one might expect this designation to be used, for example in 3:1-3 and 21:28-29, it is not. There is otherwise little evidence of concern for Gentile piety in the Gospels<sup>63</sup> and Snodgrass claims that most people in the Outer Court would not have been Gentiles.<sup>64</sup>

#### 5.4.2 The Corruption of the Priesthood

From Evan’s perspective, *contra* Sanders, there is ample evidence of Jesus being critical of the priesthood,<sup>65</sup> thus suggesting that a cleansing is indeed what he intended. The question of authenticity must be addressed, since Sanders, for example, believes Mark 11:17 to be inauthentic, a hermeneutical decision that serves his position. Evans, using the criteria of multiple attestation, Semitic language and Palestinian environment, believes it is possible to recover genuine sayings of Jesus that are indeed critical, explicitly or implicitly, of the priesthood.<sup>66</sup> These passages shall be briefly listed:<sup>67</sup>

- Mark 11:27-33 Jesus is questioned by the chief priests, among others, who ask by whose authority he is doing these things. Jesus counters with a question about John the Baptist which they refuse to answer, which Jesus uses to cast doubt on their ability to assess what is a true move of God.
- Mark 12:1-12 Jesus tells a parable about wicked vineyard tenants, easily identified by the hearers as the religious leaders, and serving as a prophetic criticism.

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<sup>61</sup> Thus Bauckham, “The title ‘Court of the Gentiles’ is a modern one, and there is no evidence that the outer court was thought of positively as the place where Gentiles could worship, rather than negatively as the limit beyond which Gentiles could not go.” Richard Bauckham, “Jesus’ Demonstration in the Temple,” in ed. Barnabas Lindars SSF, *Law and Religion: essays on the place of the law in Israel and early Christianity* (Cambridge, James Clarke & Co., 1988) 72-89: 85. See also Klyne Snodgrass, “The Temple Incident,” 469.

<sup>62</sup> Elias J. Bickerman “The Warning Inscriptions of Herod’s Temple,” *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, vol. 37, no. 4, 1947, 387–405.

<sup>63</sup> E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1985), 68-69.

<sup>64</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, “The Temple Incident,” 469. This may be true, but since most Jews would have had to traverse this outer court to get to the inner court, this is less notable.

<sup>65</sup> And therefore by implication, of the temple also.

<sup>66</sup> Evans, “Jesus’ Action...” 243.

<sup>67</sup> This list provided by Evans, “Jesus’ Action...” 244-248.

- Mark 12:41-44 Jesus comments on the religious observance of a widow who casts her two “mites” into the Temple offering. This may be a subtle critique of the nature of a priestly establishment and cultus that “robs” a widow. This will be discussed in greater depth below.
- Mark 14:43-50 The Arrest and the Injured Ear. The presence of the High Priest’s slave suggests that the High Priest did have a keen interest in the arrest of Jesus. If indeed Jesus’ Temple Action were seen as critical of the Temple authorities, this would make sense.
- Matthew 3:7b=Luke 3:7b-9 (Q): The Preaching of John. Evans believes that John the Baptist’s tirade, “You brood of vipers” is directed at Israel’s religious leaders, and that it is quite possible that Jesus, who followed John, shared his views on the corruption of the leadership.
- The Passion predictions (Mark 8:31; 9:30; 10:33-34). In two of these predictions, the “chief priests and teachers of the law” are named specifically as the antagonists who will reject Jesus and hand him over. It may be significant that the priests alone are not singled out, but the “teachers of the law,” whose sphere of influence is primarily the synagogue rather than the temple, are also implicated. This may suggest a more widespread dissatisfaction with all Jewish leadership, not merely those connected to the Temple.

Evans has thus presented a strong array of clues, and there can be no doubt that there is a definite antagonism between Jesus and the chief priests and teachers of the law. This is understandable if they felt that he was against them, and that the Temple Action was interpreted as a prophetic criticism of them. Evans has compiled an impressive set of examples from the Old Testament and intertestamental literature showing the history of the prophetic critique-from-within against the priesthood of Israel. His sources include Isaiah, Micah, Hosea 6:6 (quoted twice by Matthew, 9:13, 12:7), Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Lamentations, Zephaniah, Zechariah, Malachi, Testament of Levi, Psalms of Solomon, and the Testament of Moses.<sup>68</sup> His point, that there is a long tradition of critique of the priestly establishment, and the need for reform and cleansing is well established.<sup>69</sup> What is more difficult to ascertain from these sources, since Pharisees did not yet exist in the Old Testament, is whether this is a critique only of the priesthood, or of Jewish leadership more widely. Evan’s assessment of

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<sup>68</sup> For the specific references within these writings, see Evans, “Jesus’ Action...” 254-55 and see his more extensive treatment in Craig A. Evans, *Jesus and his Contemporaries* (Boston, Brill, 2001), Chapter 8, “Jesus’ Action in the Temple and Evidence of Corruption in the First-Century Temple” 319-344.

<sup>69</sup> Thus also Alexander J. Wedderburn, “Jesus’ Action in the Temple: A Key or a Puzzle?” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft (ZNW)* 97:1, 2006, 1-22; 22.

Sanders is that his positive view of the priesthood may be an overreaction to negative Christian caricatures of Judaism:

In reminding us of the necessity and legitimacy of the sacrificial system, something which in all likelihood Jesus would not have attacked, Sanders has too hastily dismissed the possibility of abuse within the system. Whereas it is surely a gross exaggeration to assume that Jewish religion in the time of Jesus was predominantly hypocritical and corrupt, the very existence of the prophetic writings of the First [Old] Testament bears eloquent testimony to the occasional and serious failings of this great religion... In fact, the likelihood that Jesus, if he viewed himself as a prophet at all, would have criticized the religious establishment along the lines of the classical prophets is most probable.<sup>70</sup>

There are others who agree that Jesus' main objection was to the corruption of the Temple cultus. The Qumran sect certainly thought that the Temple was illegitimate. Some representative examples from the Dead Sea Scrolls, which are important not least because they are contemporaneous with Jesus:

- (referring to Habakkuk 2:5-6) "Interpreted this concerns the Wicked Priest who was called by the name of truth when he first arose. But when he ruled over Israel his heart became proud, and he forsook God and betrayed the precepts for the sake of riches. He robbed and amassed the riches of the men of violence who rebelled against God, and he took the wealth of the peoples, heaping sinful iniquity upon himself. And he lived in the ways of abomination amidst every unclean defilement." (1 QpHab 8:9-13)<sup>71</sup>

A few verses later, the "Wicked Priest" is identified as the "last priests of Jerusalem, almost certainly referring to the High Priest and his cohort:

- "And as for that which He said, *Because you have plundered many nations, all the remnant of the peoples shall plunder you*: interpreted, this concerns the last Priests of Jerusalem, who shall amass money and wealth by plundering the people." 1 QpHab 9.4-5<sup>72</sup>
- "*Because of the blood of men and the violence done to the land, to the city, and to all its inhabitants* (ii, 8b). Interpreted, this concerns the Wicked Priest whom God delivered into the hands of his enemies because of the iniquity committed against the Teacher of Righteousness and the men of his Council, that he might be humbled by means of a destroying scourge, in bitterness of soul, because he had done wickedly to His elect." 1 QpHab 9.9

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<sup>70</sup> Evans, "Jesus' Action..." 257.

<sup>71</sup> Cited by Klyne Snodgrass, "The Temple Incident," 456-57 with numerous other examples. Dead Sea Scrolls translations here and following from Géza Vermès, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, (New York, N.Y., Allen Lane/Penguin, 1997)  
(undeletable space)

- “Moreover, they [the Priests] profane the Temple because they do not observe the distinction (between clean and unclean) in accordance with the Law, but lie with a woman who sees her bloody discharge.” CD 5.6-7<sup>73</sup>

It is clear from these few examples that the Qumran community assessed the priesthood in Jerusalem as corrupt and associated it with violence and plundering the wealth of the people. Regev agrees that it was the corruption of wealth that had a polluting effect on the Jerusalem Temple: “The corrupted wealth is morally impure, in a metaphorical sense, and had a blemishing effect on the sacrificial rite.”<sup>74</sup>

Whether the depth of corruption required destruction or cleansing from the perspective of the Qumran community is open to debate. Lupieri holds a similar view to Evans, seeing Jesus’ action as a purification rather than portent of destruction. He appeals to two Old Testament passages, Nehemiah 13:15-22, and Zechariah 14:20-21. In the first, Nehemiah’s purification of the city and enforcement of prohibited activities on the Sabbath is initiated *by the expulsion of merchants!* Zechariah describes the perfect state of the eschatological Temple, which is characterized by only holy vessels being carried within it (echoes of Mark 11:16) and the expulsion of Canaanites (merchants).<sup>75</sup>

### 5.4.3 The Use of Tyrian Coinage

Although the payment of the Temple tax seems to be a given, some scholars believe that the coinage used had the potential to offend Jesus, and his turning over of the tables of the moneychangers is a reaction against this. The Tyrian silver coins bore the image of the head of the town god Melqart, and Jesus, as a strict, monotheistic Jew with an inherent abhorrence of foreign gods and imagery thereof, may have found this extremely offensive.<sup>76</sup> One problem with this interpretation is that if Jesus’ issue was solely with the moneychangers, why was his action so apparently indiscriminate including buyers, sellers, and animals as collateral damage? It seems uncharacteristic, from what we know of him in the Gospels, for Jesus to have unfocused and indiscriminate anger. If though, this were a legitimate reason for

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<sup>73</sup> These three examples from Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, IVP Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IVP, 1997) 314. Dead Sea Scrolls translation from Géza Vermès, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, (New York, N.Y., Allen Lane/Penguin, 1997)

<sup>74</sup> Eyal Regev, “Moral Impurity and the Temple in Early Christianity in Light of Ancient Greek Practice and Qumranic Ideology,” pp. 383-411, *Harvard Theological Review* 97:4, 2004; 399-400 and see Cecilia Wassen, “The Use of Dead Sea Scrolls for Interpreting Jesus’s Action,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 23 (2016) 280-303; 294-296 in particular.

<sup>75</sup> Lupieri, “Fragments of the Historical Jesus?...” 296-97, who also highlights similar prohibitions in the Qumran documents. 297-98.

<sup>76</sup> Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 528, but see Wassen’s counter arguments in Wassen, “The Use of Dead Sea Scrolls...,” 287.



his action, it would come under the category of cleansing the Temple (from the corruption of foreign coinage) rather than destruction.

## **5.5 Symbolic act pointing towards the Destruction of the Temple (Snodgrass #3)**

Within this section, it will be argued that Jesus' Temple Action was forecasting the destruction of the Temple. What is at stake is whether this was, without judgment, simply in preparation for the eschatological temple long foretold, or whether it implied a judgment upon the Temple so severe that it merited destruction. The two possibilities will now be considered.

### **5.5.1 As Non-Judgmental Preparation for the Eschatological Temple**

E.P. Sanders has been the scholar most strongly associated with the interpretation that Jesus' action should be understood as a portent of destruction, but without any element of judgment on Jesus' part. In Sanders' reading of the event, the portent of destruction is merely preparation for the eschatological Temple, rather than being a criticism of current practice. He dismisses concerns about money changing and trade in doves being problematic arguing that these were essential to the normal functioning of the Temple.<sup>77</sup> He examines the most common interpretations of the event and concludes:

Thus far we have seen reason to doubt many of the prevalent views about the event in the Temple area: that the action was that of a religious reformer, bent on purifying current practice; that the locale, the court of the Gentiles, indicates that the action primarily had to do with opening the worship of the Temple to non-Jews; that the action was, and was perceived to be primarily against the Temple officers and the Sadducean party.<sup>78</sup>

Sanders dismisses the idea that Jesus chose the Court of the Gentiles for his action deliberately, considering it merely coincidental, and the concept of Jesus as religious reformer claiming that "If Jesus were a religious reformer... bent on correcting 'abuse' and 'present practice', we should hear charges of immorality, dishonesty and corruption directed against the priests. But such charges are absent from the gospels (except for Mark 11:17) ..."<sup>79</sup> which Sanders considers to be a later addition rather than genuine. This is a serious hermeneutical decision by Sanders to remove as inauthentic a statement from Jesus that would undermine his (Sanders') position.

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<sup>77</sup> Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 65.

<sup>78</sup> Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 69.

<sup>79</sup> Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 66.

Sanders then reaches the conclusion that Jesus is indeed protesting against the (necessary) trade in the Temple, and that the only logical interpretation is that it is a symbolic act representing the destruction of the Temple, a point which would have been easily understood by onlookers witnessing the overturning of the tables.<sup>80</sup> Against Sanders, one could argue that prior to the Herodian innovations, such trade took place outside of this area, without apparently compromising the effective functioning of the Temple.

Sanders bolsters his case by appealing to the sayings in the gospel about the destruction of the Temple (Mark 13:1; 14:57f; 15:29; Matt 26:60f; 27:40; John 2:18-22). He concludes, “that Jesus publicly predicted or threatened the destruction of the Temple, that the statement was shaped by his expectation of the eschaton, that he probably also expected a new Temple to be given by God from heaven, and that he made a demonstration which prophetically symbolized the coming event.”<sup>81</sup>

At first glance, it is surprising that Sanders does not appeal to the cursing of the fig tree as an interpretive frame for his destruction motif. This event, recorded in both Mark and Matthew, for many commentators is seen as a deliberate framing by the gospel writers to aid in interpreting the Temple Action. However, since Sanders is keen to interpret the destruction of the Temple as disconnected to any sort of judgment on the part of Jesus, his hermeneutical decision to ignore the fig tree makes sense, as the judgment motif undermines his thesis of destruction/replacement *without* judgment.

### 5.5.2 As Judgment

This section will examine the concept that Jesus was indeed judging the Temple, and by implication, the chief priests, and that the inevitable outcome of his negative judgment would be its destruction.

### 5.5.3 Failure to Become the Eschatological Temple (Bryan)

Centuries earlier, the prophets of Israel had written in expectation of a future eschatological temple. A major interpretation in favour of cleansing to be considered therefore, is the possibility that Jesus’ action was intended to move the Temple towards its ideal state anticipated in the eschatological age, and foretold by Ezekiel (40-44), Isaiah 56:7, Zechariah 14:21 and the Temple Scroll. These passages will be examined:

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<sup>80</sup> Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 70.

<sup>81</sup> Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 75.

Zechariah 14:21 states:

<sup>21</sup> Every pot in Jerusalem and Judah will be holy to the LORD Almighty, and all who come to sacrifice will take some of the pots and cook in them. And on that day there will no longer be a Canaanite in the house of the LORD Almighty. (NIV)

“Canaanite” in this context, according to Bryan, refers to traders i.e. “there will no longer be traders in the house of the Lord.”<sup>82</sup> Scholars are divided however, in view of the wider context of Zechariah 14, and while some agree with Bryan, others interpret it along the lines of “ungodly or unworthy person.”

Isaiah 56: 7 requires the previous verse for context as follows:

And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD  
to minister to him,  
to love the name of the LORD,  
and to be his servants,  
all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it  
and who hold fast to my covenant—  
<sup>7</sup> these I will bring to my holy mountain  
and give them joy in my house of prayer.  
Their burnt offerings and sacrifices  
will be accepted on my altar;  
for my house will be called  
a house of prayer for all nations.”

This looks forward to a time when Gentiles (foreigners) will be drawn to God’s holy mountain (Temple) and their sacrifices will be acceptable to him, with his house (Temple) being a house of prayer for all nations (including the Gentile nations).

Ezekiel’s vision in chapters 40-44 contains the concepts of an impressively large Temple that is filled with God’s glory.

It is debatable whether this eschatological state of affairs would ensue as a result of the Temple being renewed (cleansed) or replaced (current Temple destroyed), and even whether this new Temple would be earthly or spiritual.<sup>83</sup> Whether the Messiah would be a part of the construction of this new Temple is also open to question.<sup>84</sup> Collins argues that the expansion of the marketplace activities to the outer courts violates the concept of the eschatological Temple described in Ezekiel and the Temple Scroll, where every part of the Temple should

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<sup>82</sup> As Bryan points out, enacting it was a safer choice than quoting it, since the original “Canaanites” if interpreted literally, would have meant an exclusion of a Gentile group – the opposite of what Jesus saw as the eschatological future of the Temple. His action enables “Canaanites” to be correctly interpreted as traders with Zech 14:21 in mind. Steven M. Bryan, *Jesus and Israel’s Traditions of Judgement and Restoration* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002), 223.

<sup>83</sup> Bryan, *Jesus and Israel’s Traditions...* 189-92 for a survey of these questions.

<sup>84</sup> Bryan, *Jesus and Israel’s Traditions...* 193-194.

be holy.<sup>85</sup> Bryan, in agreement with Sanders, argues against the view that commerce itself within the Temple would have been seen as inherently defiling (rather as necessary and essential) so it must be some other failure that caused Jesus' reaction.<sup>86</sup> As we will see below, he has strong arguments to justify this position.

In his view, Jesus' action is prompted by the fact that the Second Temple had failed to become the eschatological Temple. It is the failure of the Temple to become the eschatological Temple that provokes Jesus' portent of destruction. The Temple had become a "focus for mistaken confidence in God's protective presence and specious conceptions of national election."<sup>87</sup> Bryan's hermeneutical decisions cause him to interpret Jeremiah 7, which anticipates judgment and Isaiah 56, national restoration, combining in Jesus' Temple Action to symbolize a confluence of both judgment and restoration.<sup>88</sup> The Temple is failing to be the eschatological Temple in the following ways:

b) It has become an unintended symbol (functioning almost as an idol) which the nation believed guaranteed their election and inviolability.<sup>89</sup>

c) It was failing to gather in the nations. Though provision was made for Gentiles and proselytes to worship, this was hardly the large-scale ingathering foretold in Isaiah 56:6-7.<sup>90</sup>

d) With reference to Zechariah 14:21 "every cooking pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be sacred to the Lord of hosts", the future era when distinctions between pure and impure are eradicated, has clearly not arrived. The need for the verification of "pure" sacrificial animals, and money-changers to change money into acceptably pure coinage illustrates this.<sup>91</sup>

e) The nation (and Temple) were not fruitful. The eschatological era was supposed to be a time of perpetual fruitfulness. Jesus' cursing of the fig tree illustrates this point. It "not being the season for figs" (Mark 11:13) is irrelevant when, in the eschaton, fresh fruit should be produced year-round (Ezekiel 47:12).<sup>92</sup>

f) The requirement of payment of the Temple tax conflicts with the expectation that during the eschatological era, the Temple would not require the financial support of God's people. This is a further indication that such an era has not yet arrived.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 527.

<sup>86</sup> Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions...* 209-210; Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 63-65.

<sup>87</sup> Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions...* 235.

<sup>88</sup> Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions...* 217.

<sup>89</sup> Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions...* 218.

<sup>90</sup> Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions...* 222.

<sup>91</sup> Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions...* 223.

<sup>92</sup> Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions...* 224.

<sup>93</sup> Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions...* 227.

In summary, Jesus' action in the Temple is to be understood as a judgment upon the Temple for not already becoming the eschatological Temple, and his destruction-rebuilding sayings are to be understood as his promise to create a non-physical Temple, "not made with human hands" (Mark 14:58 and parallels) that would satisfy these expectations.

#### **5.5.4 A Flawed Temple with Israel in a state akin to Exile (N.T. Wright)**

N.T. Wright follows a similar schema to Bryan, seeing the Temple Action as an "enacted parable of judgment"<sup>94</sup> and interprets it as follows:

- (i) Jesus was symbolizing the imminent destruction of the Temple
- (ii) The action had elements of both judgment and redemption
- (iii) Judgment will come at the hands of a foreign nation (Rome) as so often had happened in Israel's history
- (iv) Israel's deficiencies were: "Israel's failure to obey YHWH's call to be his people..., Israel's large scale commitment to national rebellion, coupled with her failure to enact justice within her own society, not least within the Temple-system itself."
- (v) Jesus' action was also a critique of the present Temple, as one would typically expect from a prophet of Israel.<sup>95</sup>

Given that the Temple was not perfect, and that it had failures that were apparent to both Jesus and the common people, for N.T. Wright, this is a significant indicator that the people of God would have felt themselves to be in exile. To address this we must assess the connection between Temple and exile. In a real state of exile, the problem with the Temple is that it has either been destroyed, or that it is inaccessible to a people who have been forcibly removed from their homeland. To equate a faulty Temple with exile is surely going beyond the evidence, especially when the Temple is only partly faulty, but still functioning. It is admitted that Palestine was under the unwelcome rule of a foreign, military power in the form of Rome, but the operation of the Temple was unmolested. In fact, the attempted introduction of Roman standards into the Temple was met with incredible resistance, and a standoff which resulted in a Roman concession. Josephus reports it thus:

2. Now Pilate, who was sent as procurator into Judea by Tiberius, sent by night those images of Caesar that are called ensigns into Jerusalem. This excited a very among great tumult among the Jews ...  
These came zealously to Pilate to Cesarea, and besought him to carry those ensigns out of Jerusalem,

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<sup>94</sup> N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 416.

<sup>95</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 417-418.

and to preserve them their ancient laws inviolable; but upon Pilate's denial of their request, they fell down prostrate upon the ground, and continued immovable in that posture for five days and as many nights.

3. On the next day Pilate sat upon his tribunal, in the open market-place, and called to him the multitude, as desirous to give them an answer; and then gave a signal to the soldiers, that they should all by agreement at once encompass the Jews with their weapons; so the band of soldiers stood round about the Jews in three ranks. The Jews were under the utmost consternation at that unexpected sight. Pilate also said to them that they should be cut in pieces, unless they would admit of Caesar's images, and gave intimation to the soldiers to draw their naked swords. Hereupon the Jews, as it were at one signal, fell down in vast numbers together, and exposed their necks bare, and cried out that they were sooner ready to be slain, than that their law should be transgressed. Hereupon Pilate was greatly surprised at their prodigious superstition, and gave order that the ensigns should be presently carried out of Jerusalem.<sup>96</sup>

It seems therefore that there was no particular corruption of the Temple that was worse than experienced before. Both the Hasmoneans and the Herodians were criticized for usurping the priesthood, but the piety of the common people was uninterrupted and there is no evidence of anyone calling this situation 'exile.'

It appears the Temple as an institution, even with its faults, was still viewed as legitimate by the common people, with the exception of the Qumran community who were in self-imposed 'exile.' Jesus, through his Temple Action and other sayings, shows himself painfully conscious of the Temple's failings, but does not directly condemn it as an institution. His protest seems directed at the Temple authorities who are compromising the Temple's calling through their innovation of trade within the Temple precincts. The place of the Temple Action in the narratives does lend itself towards an understanding more as a 'portent of destruction' than a cleansing. The practice of his disciples, both during Jesus' lifetime, and after his resurrection and ascension, is to continue to worship and attend the Temple. The Temple's days are numbered, not because of irredeemable corruption, but because the key functions of the Temple are being superseded by Jesus himself. A faulty Temple is not the same as a Temple inaccessible through exile corrupted by pagan invaders. The claim of N.T. Wright and others, that this sorry state of the Temple created a sense of exile in the populace, seems exaggerated and unlikely.

This hermeneutic of Bryan, and Wright clearly lends itself more towards an understanding of destruction rather than cleansing. Wright points out that almost all of the time, when the Gospels speak of Jesus and the Temple, destruction is the theme.<sup>97</sup> Mark's

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<sup>96</sup> Josephus, *Jewish War*, 2:169-174.

<sup>97</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 416.

intercalation of the Cursing of the Fig Tree story is strongly suggestive of this interpretation, and it is to this we now turn.

### 5.5.5 The Cursing of the Fig Tree

The cursing of the fig tree (Mark 11:11-14; 20-21; Matthew 21:18-20) deserves special attention due to both its literary, and apparently chronological, proximity to the Temple Action in both Mark and Matthew. Many commentators believe that Jesus' actions towards the fig tree illuminate the meaning of the Temple Action, and vice versa, particularly with Mark who brackets the Temple Action with this story:

Mark intends the reader to keep the story of the fig tree in mind while reading the story of the cleansing. The interpretation is rather obvious. The cleansing of the Temple must in some sense imply the rejection of the official representatives of Israel, the leaders of the Temple establishment. Some care is necessary at this point. It is perhaps inaccurate to suggest that the events point to the rejection of Israel... At this point it is at least possible to say that the cleansing, interpreted by the cursing of the fig tree, points to the rejection of a particular group within Israel. Those in charge of the Temple have borne no fruit; they have perverted God's intentions and will thus be rejected. This interpretation is confirmed by the account of the cleansing itself as well as the parable of the wicked husbandmen (12:1-12).<sup>98</sup>

With this interpretation, obviously the Temple and the official representatives of Israel are to be identified as one. For Craig Evans, the withering of the fig tree symbolizes not just a rejection, but also an impending destruction of the Temple:

Mark took the fig-tree story which served in his tradition as the basis for Jesus' teaching on faith and prayer (11:12-14, 20-25), and used it as a framing device for the Temple demonstration in 11:15-19. Through this intercalation, which may have been inherited from an earlier tradent, Mark shifts the accent of the episode that this combination has created. Instead of being simply a nature miracle that illustrates the power of God through faith (see 11:22-25), the fig-tree story presents a curse miracle that is a symbolic or prophetic action pointing to the coming destruction of the Temple, which is confirmed by the narrative that is intercalated between the two halves of the fig-tree story.<sup>99</sup>

The lack of productivity of the fig tree mirrors the lack of fruitfulness of the Temple.<sup>100</sup> Though there are outward signs of activity in that the fig tree has leaves, there is no fruit. This could parallel the assessment of Jesus that despite the unquestionable bustling activity in the Temple, there was little of the fruit that God desired. The general consensus, though there are naysayers,<sup>101</sup> appears to concur with the assessment that the cursing of the

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<sup>98</sup> Donald Juel, *Messiah and Temple*, 130-31.

<sup>99</sup> Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20, Word Biblical Commentary*, 160 though for Evans, an insufficient response to Jesus' attempt at "cleansing" is the reason for destruction, not inevitable in itself.

<sup>100</sup> Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 160-61.

<sup>101</sup> Oakman, apparently without agreement from other scholars, interprets the cursing of the fig tree to be a condemnation of the social system which has produced tenancy agriculture enforced by the elite classes. Douglas E. Oakman, 'Cursing Fig Trees and Robbers' Dens: Pronouncement Stories within Social-Systemic Perspective, *Mark 11:12-15 and Parallels*, *Semeia* 64, (1994) 253-272 citing 261-2). I think this unlikely.

fig tree and the Temple Action are linked, both in Jesus' mind, and in terms of Mark's narrative purpose. One is intended to see the fig tree as representative of a Temple, and/or its leaders, that is failing in terms of the fruitfulness that is expected of it. The penalty for such a failure will be severe, involving the loss of ruling privileges by the Temple's leaders (implied by the wicked tenants parable which follows) and the censure, or possibly the destruction, of the Temple itself.

Watty calls this a 'reactivation of prophecy which foretold destruction,'<sup>102</sup> and notes that if one connects the fig tree incident with this action, then one can only fairly say that the fig tree was destroyed, not cleansed, and that *its* destruction, inasmuch as it informs the interpretation of this passage, points towards the destruction of the Temple.<sup>103</sup>

That the fig tree incident is used by Mark to inform the understanding of the Temple Action is a given for most scholars. Mark's redactional activity, his use of a "Markan sandwich" is experienced elsewhere in his gospel with a similar purpose of illuminating the interpretation of an event. However, the historicity of the whole fig tree incident has been questioned. For one thing, it seems punitive and out of character with the rest of Jesus' public ministry, which is restorative in the main, rather than destructive. Additionally, it does not fit naturally with the sayings on faith, prayer and forgiveness in 11:22-25. According to Meier, drawing upon insights from composition, source and tradition criticism, the incident fails two primary criteria for genuine historicity: the criterion of discontinuity, and the criterion of coherence.<sup>104</sup> Meier sees that as part of Mark's "redactional vision" functioning as "a prophecy in action, symbolizing the rejection and destruction of the Temple..."<sup>105</sup>

## **5.6 The Oppression of the Poor (Snodgrass #6 part 2) – a specific consequence of the corruption**

One of the potential consequences of corruption is that certain sectors of society may suffer more as a result than others. If in fact the Temple had become commercialized, it is the poor who would suffer more than others who were in a better financial situation.

Bauckham's perspectives on the impact on the poor, and a re-examination of the significance of the Widow's Mite story, will shed further light on this possibility.

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<sup>102</sup> W.W. Watty, 'Jesus and the Temple – Cleansing or Cursing,' *Expository Times* 93:8 (1992) 238.

<sup>103</sup> Watty, 'Jesus and the Temple' 237.

<sup>104</sup> Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, Vol. 2, 895.

<sup>105</sup> Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, Vol 2, 886.



### 5.6.1 The Oppression of the Poor (Bauckham)

Richard Bauckham, in his chapter on “Jesus’ Demonstration in the Temple”<sup>106</sup> makes a compelling case that Jesus’ objection was not only to commercialism *per se*, but to the way in which the commercial aspects of the Temple were having a disproportionately negative impact upon the poor. His starting point, and lens through which he assesses this action, is the pericope of Jesus and the Temple tax (Matt 17:24-27). Jesus’ pointed question, “From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes – from their own children or from others?” is met with his own reply that “the children are exempt.” Bauckham’s argument then starts from the same premise, that since the Israelites are God’s children, they should not be subject to the tax, which is more appropriate and fitting for a king-subject relationship. “Theocratic taxation, levied in God’s name, is inappropriate in view of God’s fatherhood.”<sup>107</sup> He goes on to examine the four key components of Jesus’ action as follows:

#### a) Turning over the tables of the moneychangers

Bauckham argues that it was not the location of the moneychanging, or swindling customers that was the issue: “His was a radical objection to the tax itself, and whereas in Capernaum Jesus had been concerned not to offend the local tax collectors (Matt 17:27), who were no doubt motivated by piety towards the Temple and could have understood refusal to pay as a criticism of the sacrificial cult which the tax financed, he now confronted the machinery of tax collecting operated by the Temple officials themselves in the Temple.”<sup>108</sup>

#### b) Overturning the chairs of those selling doves

He notes that the primary group who would offer doves, as an alternative cheaper sacrifice, would be the poor, and “if the Temple monopoly in the sale of doves operated to keep the price high, it would make the sacrificial system a burden to the poor in the same way that the Temple tax did. Jesus would object, as he did to the Temple tax, that the God in whose name the Temple authorities acted does not burden his people with oppressive financial demands.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Bauckham, “Jesus’ Demonstration in the Temple,” 72-89.

<sup>107</sup> Bauckham, “Jesus’ Demonstration...” 74.

<sup>108</sup> Bauckham, “Jesus’ Demonstration...” 75.

<sup>109</sup> Bauckham, “Jesus’ Demonstration...” 77.

He emphasizes that this is particularly heinous since the provision of doves was provided to lighten the burden of expensive sacrifices from the shoulders of the poor, but in its current application was providing an additional financial strain.<sup>110</sup>

c) Preventing people carrying objects through the Temple

Bauckham suspects that these objects were Temple vessels that carried flour, oil, and wine; items used in offerings, and that these were being sold at a profit. The Temple had a monopoly on this, and had turned it into a profit-making business.<sup>111</sup>

d) He drove out those buying and selling

Bauckham speculates that this does not refer to worshippers, who Jesus would hardly have driven out, but to Temple staff buying supplies for the Temple, to later sell at a profit, and merchants seeking to buy valuable items donated to the Temple.<sup>112</sup>

These last two points seem somewhat speculative, and depend upon a specific hermeneutical decision to interpret the “vessels” and “those buying and selling” as part of the corrupt Temple apparatus, but this is not easy to prove. However, the strength of the first two points seems to validate Bauckham’s conclusion:

“Jesus’ protest was primarily against commercialism rather than corruption. But we should also consider, as adding fuel to the fire, the evidence that the priestly aristocracy who controlled the Temple’s hierarchy were believed to support a conspicuously expensive lifestyle by corruption and violence... Jesus’ demonstration in the Temple can therefore be understood as a principled religious protest not against some minor abuses of the sacred precincts but against what Jesus must have seen as serious misconduct by the nation’s religious leaders.”<sup>113</sup>

### 5.6.2 The Mighty Mite (Mark 12:41-44) – an oppressive system

Though traditionally the widow’s actions in this pericope have been held to be a praiseworthy demonstration of generosity and radical trust in God to provide for her needs,<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Bauckham, “Jesus’ Demonstration...” 77.

<sup>111</sup> Bauckham, “Jesus’ Demonstration...” 78.

<sup>112</sup> Bauckham, “Jesus’ Demonstration...” 78.

<sup>113</sup> Bauckham, “Jesus’ Demonstration...” 79, 81.

<sup>114</sup> See A.G. Wright, “The Widow’s Mites: Praise or Lament?,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 44 (1982) 256-66; 257-58 for a list of commentators who trend in this direction.

commentators such as Fitzmyer, Wright and Malbon consider it a lament over a religious establishment that takes money from the poor, and to which the poor feel obligated to contribute, at the expense of the bare minimum they have to live on.<sup>115</sup> It may be that this story, rather than the cursing of the fig tree, should provide the key interpretive lens for understanding the Temple Action, if indeed the commercialism of the cultus and enrichment of the priests is in view as Jesus' main objection. This story, as an interpretive key to the Temple Action, is one that has been mostly neglected by scholars in that regard and is worthy of deeper inquiry. It is one of those stories that functions ambiguously in regard to the question of "cleansing or destruction?" If indeed it represents reprehensible behaviour by the priests and teachers of the law, then it could be seen as a rebuke and attempt at cleansing from such behaviour. However, the context, which includes doom-laden comments about the Temple, immediately following the story at the beginning of chapter 13, could lead the reader in the direction of a destruction interpretation.

Just as the fig tree incident, understood as the redaction of Mark, indicates an authorial intention, so the placement of the Widow's Mite story adds context to the comments about the Temple that follow. Indeed the verses prior to the story are suggestive:

<sup>38</sup> As he taught, Jesus said, "Watch out for the teachers of the law. They like to walk around in flowing robes and be greeted with respect in the marketplaces,<sup>39</sup> and have the most important seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets. <sup>40</sup> They devour widows' houses and for a show make lengthy prayers. These men will be punished most severely." (Mark 12:38-40)

Immediately following this comment about widow's houses being devoured, Jesus highlights the actions of a widow who puts in "everything she had to live on." (Mark 12:44). It has been assumed this Jesus' words are a commendation of the widow, but this is far from certain. It could as well be understood as a critique of the priesthood<sup>116</sup> and a religious system that pressures a poor widow to make the unwise choice to spend her very living expenses to satisfy the demands of the cultus. Earlier in the chapter Mark records Jesus saying that loving God and your neighbor "is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices." (Mark 12:32). A few verses after the widow's mite incident, Jesus says, in response to the disciples' admiration of the Temple, "Do you see all these great buildings? Not one stone here will be

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<sup>115</sup> Evans, "Jesus' Action..." 245 cites Fitzmyer, Luke X-XXIV, 1321, Wright, "The Widow's Mites..." 256-66 and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon, "The Poor Widow in Mark and Her Poor Rich Readers," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 53 (1991) 589-604 who hold a similar view.

<sup>116</sup> Though potentially less so, since the teachers of the law are not directly connected to the Temple, but operative in the synagogue setting. This again might point to a wider dissatisfaction with Jewish leadership beyond the priests and Temple context.

left on another; every one will be thrown down. Within 15 verses (Mark 12:33-13:2) we encounter the following sequence:

- a relativizing of the importance of offerings and sacrifices (12:32)
- a criticism of the rapacity and religious showiness of the teachers of the law (38-40)
- a questionable offering from a poor widow (41-44), without any invitation from Jesus to imitate her actions
- a prediction of the Temple's doom (13:2)

In Luke's gospel also (21:45-22:6), we find this same sequence, excluding the first. Either Luke has preserved Mark's order (assuming Markan priority and Mark being a source for Luke) or he created it himself. In either case, the close proximity of criticism of teachers of the law, widow's action and prediction of Temple doom can hardly be accidental.

As A.G. Wright points out, if we were to witness such an event, "would we not judge the act to be repulsive and to be based on misguided piety because she would be neglecting her own needs?"<sup>117</sup> He points out that if Jesus is simply pointing out that even the poor can be generous, this saying verges on trite, and has similar parallels in other literature (Aristotle for example) and so would hardly be worth Mark recording.<sup>118</sup> Further, his statements on Corban (Mark 7:10-13) trend in the opposite direction, criticising those who make offerings to God while neglecting important human needs. Clearly the subsistence needs of the widow would qualify under this same rubric.<sup>119</sup> In the end, it is a lament:

"She had been taught and encouraged by religious leaders to donate as she does, and Jesus condemns the value system that motivates her action, and he condemns the people who conditioned her to do it... her contribution was totally misguided, thanks to the encouragement of official religion, but the final irony of it all [in light of the impending destruction of the Temple] was that it was also a waste."<sup>120</sup>

Elizabeth Struthers Malbon examines the interpretation of the story in three commentaries on Mark's Gospel that represent three approaches to biblical interpretation: historical-critical (Henry Barclay Swete 1898), form-critical (Taylor, 1952) and redaction-critical (Nineham).<sup>121</sup> As might be expected, Swete spends time exploring the historical details of the text; Taylor is interested in historical, literary parallels in other religious traditions, and the *Sitz im Leben* of both Jesus and the early church behind the Marcan oral tradition; Nineham is curious about how Mark handles this tradition and less interested (and

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<sup>117</sup> Wright, "The Widow's Mites..." 256.

<sup>118</sup> Wright, "The Widow's Mites..." 260.

<sup>119</sup> Wright, "The Widow's Mites..." 260, though again Jesus' comment is directed against Pharisees not priests.

<sup>120</sup> Wright, "The Widow's Mites..." 262, 263.

<sup>121</sup> Malbon, "The Poor Widow in Mark..." 589.

convinced by) the actual historical background.<sup>122</sup> Despite their varied hermeneutical approaches, all three hold to the traditional position that the widow's action is to be interpreted as exemplary and praiseworthy, though with some nuances of difference. Malbon's personal assessment is that there are wider narrative contexts available (she names six) by which to interpret this story, and that it is the context of Jesus' whole story that provides the best understanding. One of her parallels is that just as the widow gave "her whole life" (usually translated as "all she had to live on") so Jesus is willing to give *his* whole life as a ransom for many (Mk 10:45).<sup>123</sup> She believes that this sequence also portends the Temple's destruction:

"The episode of the poor widow's gift of her all might well be understood as an enacted parable parallel to the fig tree incident or parallel to the intercalated fig tree/Temple incident as a whole. The fig tree episode introduces a series of controversies between Jesus and Jewish religious authorities in the Temple; the account of the poor widow's action closes the series."<sup>124</sup>

## **5.7 Replacement of Temple with himself (Snodgrass #4)**

It is worth considering the possibility that whatever the state of the Temple, its useful life was coming to an end, either because Jesus himself would replace many of its functions, becoming the ultimate locus of God's dwelling place, or indeed because it was only ever intended as an imperfect precursor pointing forward to Jesus in the first place, much as the sacrificial system itself.

### **5.7.1 As a Portent of Replacement, not with Eschatological Temple, but himself**

Was Jesus' action intended as an attack on the sacrificial system? Did Jesus see himself as superior to the Temple? Did he, through his words and ministry, undermine the sacrificial system and the Temple? Were his actions consciously Messianic or Maccabean? Was Jesus ushering in an eschatological era within which the Temple, whether functioning correctly or not, would become obsolescent? Is Jesus not actually intending that the Temple be replaced with himself, but rather with the nascent Christian community that is forming?

It is true that certain pronouncements in the gospel records seem to imply that Jesus did see himself as, in some sense, superior to the Temple: "I tell you that one greater than the Temple is here" (Matt 12:6). This is a bold claim indeed since the Temple was believed to be

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<sup>122</sup> Malbon, "The Poor Widow in Mark..." 590-92.

<sup>123</sup> Malbon, "The Poor Widow in Mark..." 596.

<sup>124</sup> Malbon, "The Poor Widow in Mark..." 597.

the primary locus of God's activity, and Jesus is arrogating this function to himself. It is likely that such a statement would have been seen as, at the very least, arrogant, and most probably blasphemous by his hearers

Also, unlike the fate of the Jerusalem Temple, Jesus claimed that if 'his' Temple was destroyed that he could raise it to life again:

'Jesus answered them, "Destroy this Temple, and I will raise it again in three days."  
The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?"  
But the Temple he had spoken of was his body.' (Jn 2:19-21)

Walton, building on Harold W. Turner's work, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Places of Worship*<sup>125</sup> suggests that Jesus was indeed replacing the major functions of the Temple with his own being.<sup>126</sup> According to Turner, a sacred place 'acts as centre, as meeting-point, as microcosm, and as a transcendent immanent presence.'<sup>127</sup> He further explains these functions as follows:

a) The Temple as centre.

The Temple serves as a locus point, an anchor of security in an uncertain, chaotic world. All [forms and structures] become completely reliable and receive the protection they need only when linked to or organized from some secure centre of power that is unassailable, permanent and immutable. Such a centre of reference is found in the sacred place where contact may be made with a much more real and solid world than that of everyday uncertain and changing experience.<sup>128</sup>

b) The Temple as meeting point.

The Temple is the place where the god(s) and humankind can engage with one another, where rituals and sacrifices are properly offered and received.

c) It is a place of immanent transcendent presence where the presence of the divine is manifested.<sup>129</sup> Even though Jews no doubt understood Yahweh's transcendence, he was believed to also "dwell" in the Temple.<sup>130</sup> 'The very setting aside of a special sacred area or precinct is the first recognition that the gods are not equally present at all places, that their presence at the sanctuary transcends, as it were, their immanent presence elsewhere.'<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Harold W. Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House: The Phenomenology and Theology of Places of Worship*, Religion and Society 16 (The Hague/Paris/New York: Mouton, 1979).

<sup>126</sup> Steve Walton, "A Tale of Two Perspectives? The Temple in Acts" in ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Simon Gathercole, *Heaven on Earth: The Temple in Biblical Theology* (Carlisle, Paternoster, 2004) 135-49.

<sup>127</sup> Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House*, 18.

<sup>128</sup> Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House*, 19.

<sup>129</sup> Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House*, 22.

<sup>130</sup> cf. Mt 23:21: And he who swears by the Temple swears by it and by the one who dwells in it.

<sup>131</sup> Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House*, 32.

d) The Temple as a microcosm of the heavenly world.

‘It is part of the world which shares most fully in the heavenly realm and must be fit for the gods’ presence. It is, as it were, a little piece of heaven on earth, or at least it corresponds to the heavenly original as an earthly replica, a mirror of its model or a microcosm of the cosmos as a whole.’<sup>132</sup>

The relevance of these functions is seen in how the early Christians speak of and relate to Jesus in the years following his death and resurrection. It is true that Jesus never taught directly that his disciples should abandon the Temple, but it is also the case that they often spoke about him in ways that bring to mind those functions which formerly belonged to the Temple.

Walton is worth quoting at length here:

When we examine the Acts accounts of the life of the earliest Christians, it is striking that each of Turner’s four functions of sacred places is actually performed by God, and in particular by Jesus and/or the Spirit.

First, rather than the Temple being the focus of their prayers, providing a centre and point of orientation, the earliest Christians pray in many different locations, but always focused on Jesus. More, his “name” is the authority and power of their work. *He* provides the “centre” which they lean upon.

Second, rather than the Temple being the meeting point of heaven and earth, it is the person of Jesus who brings humanity together: through him forgiveness of sins is available (2:38, 3:19); by his work “times of refreshing” come from the Lord (3:20); his is the only effective saving name among humanity (4:12); as Lord of all he brings peace between God and humankind (10:38); and through his grace Jews and Gentiles alike are saved (15:11; 16:31). He takes over this function of the Temple and extends it to Gentiles, who were not permitted into the majority of the Temple complex, as well as to women and Jewish laymen, who were not allowed into the places of sacrifice within the Temple.

Third, rather than the Temple being a microcosm of the heavenly realm, Christians now live in the heavenly realm - at least in part - because of Jesus...

Fourth, Jesus and the Spirit convey the immanent-transcendent presence of God, which is not understood as localised. Transcendence is clear from the departure of Jesus in the cloud (1:9), echoing the presentation of the son of man figure to the Ancient of Days. The martyr Stephen sees Jesus as this son of man at the right hand of God, in a position of power and authority (7:55f).

Immediate presence is experienced by the Spirit, who comes upon the early church and indwells them, both collectively (e.g. 2:4, 16ff, 38; 4:31) and individually (e.g. 4:8; 6:3, 5; 8:15, 17) ...<sup>133</sup>

Items 1 and 4 seem justifiable, but 2 and 3 are more tenuous. The Jerusalem Temple still did function as a meeting point, as the disciples continued attendance (Acts 3 for example) and, after a period of time, so also the houses of the early believers served as a meeting point. It is difficult to imagine believers having a sense of “place” with Jesus, when the “meeting” is of a spiritual nature. And as for living in the heavenly realm, though their days were certainly coloured by their new found faith in Jesus, their everyday was still replete with more prosaic concerns. “Living in the heavenly realms” as Walton describes it, would not supplant their everyday sense of reality.

However, even if only partially convincing, this list demonstrates how many of the functions traditionally performed by the Temple are now attributed to Jesus. Bertil Gärtner

<sup>132</sup> Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House*, 26.

<sup>133</sup> Steve Walton, *A Tale of Two Perspectives?*, 137-39.

holds substantially the same view: ‘Instead he [Jesus] did as had been done in Qumran: he transferred the activities of the Temple from Jerusalem to another entity. This entity was Jesus himself and the group around him as Messiah.’<sup>134</sup> Wright claims that the early Christians were abandoning the cherished symbols of Judaism: Temple, Torah, Land and ethnic identity: ‘Their initially ambiguous attitude to the Temple... gave birth to a use of Temple-language as a rich source of metaphor through which they lent depth to their beliefs both about Jesus and the church itself.’<sup>135</sup>

What seems to be happening, even prior to the Temple’s physical destruction, is that it is moving in the direction of obsolescence. It is to this consideration that we now turn.

### 5.7.2 Shaky Beginnings, Destruction and Eschatological Obsolescence

It is possible that Jesus’ action in the Temple was not concerned either with Temple purity or opposing the sacrificial system as such. It could be that the era of the Temple was drawing to a close, and that the prophecies of its destruction were simply a precursor to Jesus taking over its functions. Thus Sanders:

... we conclude that Jesus publicly predicted or threatened the destruction of the Temple, that the statement was shaped by his expectation of the arrival of the eschaton, that he probably also expected a new Temple to be given by God from heaven, and that he made a demonstration which prophetically symbolized the coming event.<sup>136</sup>

The exchange between Jesus and the scribe in Mark 12 also seems to hint strongly in this direction:

The scribe said, ‘You are right, teacher: you have said truly that he is one, and that there is none beside him; and that to love him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbour as oneself, is more than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices.’ And when Jesus saw that he had answered intelligently, he said to him: ‘You are not far from the kingdom of god.’ [Mk. 12.32-4]

To say that *anything* is better than “burnt-offerings and sacrifices” certainly brings into question the sufficiency of the sacrificial system of the Temple.<sup>137</sup> Other rituals such as the Last Supper also provide a contrast between Jesus and the Temple.<sup>138</sup> Even his death was a form of sacrifice, outside of the ambit of the Temple.<sup>139</sup> His pronouncements of individual forgiveness, without reference to the Temple system or sacrifice, also point in this

<sup>134</sup> Bertil Gärtner, *The Temple and The Community* 114.

<sup>135</sup> N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1992) 365-66.

<sup>136</sup> E.P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* 75

<sup>137</sup> Wright comments on this exchange: ‘It indicates that, for Jesus, part of the point of the kingdom he was claiming to inaugurate would be that it would bring with it all that the Temple offered, thereby replacing, and making redundant, Israel’s greatest symbol...’ *Jesus and the Victory of God* 434-5, cf. 277 ‘his movement was in some sense a replacement of it [the Temple]’.

<sup>138</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 558.

<sup>139</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 604.



direction.<sup>140</sup> Gärtner claims that this Temple Action is in view of the ‘better worship of the eschatological Temple (cf. Isa. lvi and Jer. vii)... The Temple building was soon to go and to be replaced by better fellowship with God.’<sup>141</sup>

One way in which Jesus is superior to the Temple can be inferred from the references contrasting the ‘Temple built with hands’ to the Temple ‘not built with hands.’<sup>142</sup> Commentators see this other Temple as either Jesus himself, the nature of the new fellowship with God,<sup>143</sup> or as the new Christian community that he founded.<sup>144</sup> The description of the new community as a ‘Temple’ was not an innovation of the New Testament writers. The Qumran community saw themselves as a Temple replacement.<sup>145</sup> This is an interesting parallel to the early Christian community: ‘In a movement proximate to Christianity in time and place, a community used Temple imagery as a self-designation. More important, Temple imagery was used as a self-designation by a community that conceived itself as the congregation of the last days.’<sup>146</sup> N.T. Wright concurs:

They [the Qumran sect] saw themselves as related ambiguously to the Temple: the Pharisees saw their own purity as an extension, the Essenes as a temporary replacement, of Temple purity, and we can assume that John the Baptist and his followers were somewhere on this spectrum as well... his [Jesus] construal of the symbolic world of Judaism involved, as with the Essenes, a sharp critique of the Temple and the clear understanding that his movement was in some sense a replacement for it.<sup>147</sup>

The Qumran community obviously felt that the worship in the Jerusalem Temple was compromised by a corrupt priesthood, and that the community itself could make up for what the Temple lacked.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> cf. Mt 9:2/Mk 2:5/Lk 5:20; Lk 7:47-8.

<sup>141</sup> Gärtner, “The Temple and The Community” 110 and cf. 120-21 and see John Paul Heil, ‘The Narrative Strategy and Pragmatics of the Temple in Mark,’ *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 59 Jan 1997, 76-100 citing 96: ‘By Dying and Rising Jesus Builds a New Sanctuary (Mark 14:47-49, 58; 15:29; 15:38-16:8)’.

<sup>142</sup> Mk 14:58 “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this man-made Temple and in three days will build another, not made by man.’” (cf. Acts 7:48; 17:24) Juel believes this reveals Mark’s anti-Temple-cult bias. (Juel, *Messiah and Temple*, 205).

<sup>143</sup> Gärtner, *The Temple and The Community*, 111-12.

<sup>144</sup> Juel, *Messiah and Temple*, 139 and cf. 134 ‘The Temple will be destroyed (13:1-2; cf. 14:58 and 15:29), to be replaced by a new reality (a ‘Temple not made with hands,’ 14:58).’ He believes that Jesus’ comments on prayer and forgiveness after the withered fig tree incident are intended to draw a contrast between the Temple, which is failing to be a ‘house of prayer for all nations’ and the new Christian community ‘typified by prayer and forgiveness.’ 135-36.

<sup>145</sup> Juel, *Messiah and Temple*, 161-63 ‘The texts in which the community is most clearly characterized as Temple are the following: 1QS8:4-7, 8:8-10, 9:3-6, 5:5-7; CD 3:18-4:10; 1QpH 12:3.’

<sup>146</sup> Juel, *Messiah and Temple* 167.

<sup>147</sup> Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 276-77. Turner comments that the Qumran sect ‘show themselves more sensitive than most to the limitations and impermanent nature of the Temple type of sanctuary.’ (Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House*, 78).

<sup>148</sup> Gärtner, *The Temple and The Community*, 20-21 ‘But when a cultus of the Jerusalem Temple could no longer be accepted, a substitute was found in the community itself: the Temple, its worship, ...and its sacrifices were made to apply to the community *per se*, its life of obedience to the Law and its liturgy.’

Turner poses the intriguing suggestion that the existence of an earthly Temple in any state, whether corrupt or not, fell short of God's original purposes, and that, like the monarchy, building the original Temple was a concession. He cites as evidence two prophetic figures speaking against the Temple, both at the beginning and within sight of its end. Nathan initially responds enthusiastically to David's proposal to build a Temple, but after consulting with the LORD he withdraws his approval and expresses both the divine rejection of the Temple plan, and the adequacy of the tabernacle as a centre for worship (2 Sam 7:4-10, 17). The 'house' that David *is* permitted to build is a dynasty that will be permanent; '...the subject changed from a sacred place to a holy people.'<sup>149</sup>

At the other end of the Temple's lifetime, approximately thirty-five years before its final and permanent destruction, Stephen, the first Christian martyr, is also critical of the Temple. He is accused of 'speaking against this holy place' (Acts 6:13), affirms the former adequacy of the tabernacle (Acts 7:44,45) and then asserts that 'the Most High does not live in houses made by men' (Acts 7:48). Turner is surely right when he claims, 'In spite of all that we have been able to say about the spiritual values and insights supported by the Temple type of sacred place, these two dissentient figures standing at the beginning and the end of the Jerusalem Temple's history cannot be ignored.'<sup>150</sup>

In summary then, one is able to conclude that even if evidence of corruption within the Temple was not forthcoming, given the advent of Jesus, the Temple's usefulness was coming to an end. In view of the coming eschaton, and the functions of the Temple that Jesus was apparently arrogating to himself, the Temple was moving in the direction of eschatological obsolescence. Its failures were probably no greater than in the past, but a new era is dawning when the Temple, the place of 'tabernacling' with God, is overshadowed by the new tabernacle and the new 'high priest,' Jesus himself.<sup>151</sup>

This connection to the eschaton leads to another consideration, namely, whether to interpret Jesus' actions as messianic. His allusions to the Zechariah passages in both word and action are provocative in this regard. He has entered the city on a donkey (Mk 11:7-10), which would most likely have brought to mind the messianic passage in Zechariah 9:9:

'Rejoice greatly, O Daughter of Zion! Shout, Daughter of Jerusalem! See, your king comes to you, righteous and having salvation, gentle and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey.' The shouts of 'Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David' (Mk

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<sup>149</sup> Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House*, 75.

<sup>150</sup> Turner, *From Temple to Meeting House*, 75.

<sup>151</sup> cf. Hebrews 4:18-19.

11:10) and ‘Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord’ (Lk 19:38) certainly imply that his arrival is seen in the context of a royal dynasty; after all, who brings a kingdom, but a king? His claims that he would build the Temple again also allude to the Zechariah promise that the coming king ‘shall build the Temple of the LORD’ (Zech 5:12). His condemnation of the traders in currency and sacrificial animals within the Temple precincts certainly reminds of Zechariah 14:21, the day when ‘there will no longer be a trader in the house of the LORD Almighty.’ That Jesus had these passages in Zechariah in mind, and was deliberately evoking their messianic associations seems incontrovertible.<sup>152</sup> Gärtner concurs:

...the actual events described in the pericope of the cleansing of the Temple are an expression of the Messianic consciousness of Jesus. They express the idea that Jesus *qua* Messiah now had the authority to demonstrate, in word and deed, that the time had come for the establishment of the ‘new’ Temple and a new and better basis of fellowship with God... I find it difficult to avoid interpreting the pericope as an expression of Jesus’ Messianic attitude to the Temple. The only one who can behave this way is the Lord of the Temple... it becomes even clearer that the cleansing of the Temple was to Jesus a way of showing what the ‘house of God’ was to be in the last days: a house of prayer, a house in which the true fellowship with God could be found.<sup>153</sup>

Hamilton emphasizes the important economic function of the Temple and claims that Jesus’ act would have been seen unmistakably as messianic: ‘Without the authority of the Sanhedrin or Roman procurator such sovereign interference in the economic affairs of the Temple must have been taken as a direct claim to be king.’<sup>154</sup> Moulton calls Jesus the ‘regal Lord of the Temple who comes to inspect it for the fruitfulness that God requires.’<sup>155</sup>

Perhaps the most telling piece of evidence in this regard is the *titulus* affixed to Jesus’ cross. For the Romans, Jesus was executed not only in order to appease the populace, but on the terms that would be meaningful to them as an occupying army: as a Messiah, a would-be king who threatened Rome’s hegemony.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> see, for example, Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 491.

<sup>153</sup> Gärtner, *The Temple and The Community*, 107.

<sup>154</sup> Neill Q. Hamilton, ‘Temple Cleansing and Temple Bank,’ *Journal of Biblical Literature* 83 (D-1964) 365-72 citing 371.

<sup>155</sup> Mark Moulton, ‘Jesus’ Goal for Temple and Tree: A Thematic Revisit of Matt 21:12-22,’ *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 41/4, 561-574: 565.

<sup>156</sup> Juel believes that Mark includes the Temple charge in Mk 14:48 in order to highlight the messianic theme (*Messiah and Temple* 124). cf. Hamilton: ‘We must deduce that, in spite of non-political intentions, Jesus performed some act which seemed to Jewish and Roman authorities an exercise of kingly prerogative.’ *Temple Cleansing and Temple Bank* 365

## 6. Conclusion

Just as the story of the cursing of the fig tree, in line with Mark's editorial intention, has been an interpretive key for understanding Jesus' actions, portending destruction, it is plausible, to argue that another key for interpretation is the story of the Widow's mite.<sup>157</sup> Far from being an exemplary act intended as an example for future believers, the story is told immediately prior to the disciples' comments on how impressive the Temple is. Either Jesus drawing attention to the widow is another in the sequence of "things that are impressive" or more likely, he is showing what the cost of such grandeur has been, within a cultic apparatus that persuades a widow to part with all that she has to live on.

It is the commercial aspect of the Temple, and how it lines the pockets of the ruling families at the literal expense of the poor that most offends Jesus. This money-making machine, which further solidifies the predominant social stratification, falls far short of the ideal Temple envisaged in Ezekiel and the Qumran War Scroll, where pure worship would take place, and people from everywhere would stream to the Temple.

Jesus understands that despite his rebukes, the Temple will not reform, and will be destroyed. In its place, an understanding of himself as the true Temple, replacing almost all of the Temple's functions will grow among his followers, and it is this reality, together with the Temple's failures, that ensure its doom.

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Word Count: 18428

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<sup>157</sup> Though, due to Mark's deliberate intercalation of the Fig Tree story, it should still function as the dominant key.

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