

## JESUS' INTERVENTION IN THE TEMPLE: ONCE OR TWICE?

ALLAN CHAPPLE\*

The Gospel of John has Jesus intervening dramatically in the Temple (John 2:13–22) before he begins his public ministry in Galilee (John 3:24; 4:3; cf. Mark 1:14). However, the only such event reported in the Synoptics occurs at the end of Jesus' ministry (Mark 11:15–18 and parallels). What are we to make of this discrepancy?

Logically, there are four possible explanations:

1. The Synoptics are right about when the event took place—so that John has moved it to the beginning of the ministry, presumably for theological reasons. This is the view of the overwhelming majority.

2. John is right about when this happened—so the Synoptic Gospels have moved it to the end of Jesus' ministry (again, presumably for theological reasons).<sup>1</sup>

3. Neither the Synoptics nor John have got it right, because no such event occurred.<sup>2</sup>

\* Allan Chapple is Senior Lecturer in NT at Trinity Theological College, P.O. Box 115, Leederville, Perth, WA 6902, Australia.

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Paul N. Anderson, *The Fourth Gospel and the Quest for Jesus: Modern Foundations Reconsidered* (LNTS 321; London: T&T Clark, 2006) 158–61; F.-M. Braun, “L'expulsion des vendeurs du Temple (Mt., xxi, 12–17, 23–27; Mc., xi, 15–19, 27–33; Lc., xix, 45–xx, 8; Jo., ii, 13–22),” *RB* 38 (1929) 188–91; R. A. Edwards, *The Gospel according to St. John: Its Interpretation and Criticism* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1954) 37–38; A. H. N. Green-Armytage, *John Who Saw: A Layman's Essay on the Authorship of the Fourth Gospel* (London: Faber & Faber, 1952) 111–12; M.-J. Lagrange, *Évangile selon Saint Jean* (Ebib; Paris: Gabalda, 1925) 64–65; Francis J. Moloney, “The Fourth Gospel and the Jesus of History,” *NTS* 46 (2000) 55–57; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, “Jesus and the Money-Changers (Mark 11:15–17; John 2:13–17),” in *Keys to Jerusalem: Collected Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012) 68, 71–74 [this is an expanded version of this article in *RB* 107 (2000) 42–55]; J. A. T. Robinson, “‘His Witness is True’: A Test of the Johannine Claim,” in *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (ed. Ernst Bammel and C. F. D. Moule; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 455–60; idem, *The Priority of John* (ed. J. F. Coakley; London: SCM, 1985) 128–31; Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (2d ed.; London: Macmillan, 1966) 461–62.

<sup>2</sup> So, e.g., Jürgen Becker, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1998) 333; George Wesley Buchanan, “Symbolic Money-Changers in the Temple?” *NTS* 37 (1991) 280–90; Ernst Haenchen, *John* (2 vols.; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 1:187–90; Robert J. Miller, “The (A)Historicity of Jesus' Temple Demonstration: A Test Case in Methodology,” *SBLSP* 30 (1991) 235–52; David Seeley, “Jesus' Temple Act,” *CBQ* 55 (1993) 263–83; Klaus Wengst, *Das Johannes-evangelium* (2d ed.; THKNT; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2004) 1:116–18. Doubting the event without actually denying it is Paula Fredriksen, “The Historical Jesus, the Scene in the Temple, and the Gospel of John,” in *John, Jesus, and History*, vol. 1: *Critical Appraisals of Critical Views* (ed. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher; SBLSymS 44; Atlanta: SBL, 2007) 265–67.

A careful case for historicity is made by Jostein Ådna, *Jesu Stelling zum Tempel: Die Tempelaktion und das Tempelwort als Ausdruck seiner messianischen Sendung* (WUNT 2/119; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000) 300–33; idem, “Jesus and the Temple,” in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* (ed. Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter; 4 vols.; Leiden: Brill, 2011) 3:2638–54; and Klyne R. Snodgrass, “The Temple

4. Both accounts are right, because two such episodes took place, one at the beginning and one at the end of Jesus' ministry. This was the dominant view until the modern era, and it still has the support of some scholars.<sup>3</sup>

The purpose of this article is to make a case for the fourth of these explanations. We should note at the outset that there is little sympathy for this view, which has been dismissed in rather scathing terms: "the familiar argument of two cleansings is a historiographic monstrosity that has no basis in the texts of the Gospels."<sup>4</sup> C. H. Dodd went so far as to call it a "puerile expedient,"<sup>5</sup> although he used slightly less caustic terms in his subsequent study of John: "The suggestion that the temple was twice cleansed is the last resort of a desperate determination to harmonize Mark and John at all costs."<sup>6</sup>

One reason for mounting this case is to show that such dismissals are unwarranted, because we get to two Temple interventions on the part of Jesus as a result of carefully assessing the evidence. What follows seeks to demonstrate that John is reporting a different event from the Synoptics, and that there were thus two of these incidents, one at each end of Jesus' ministry. We will make this case in five steps.

## I. COMPARING THE ACCOUNTS

Our first step involves demonstrating that the Synoptic accounts and John's account are simply not similar enough to be different versions of the same event. Our starting point is to note the obvious fact that there are both similarities and

Incident," in *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence* (ed. Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 429–39.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Barnett, *John: The Shepherd King* (Sydney South: Aquila, 2005) 32–34; Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels* (2d ed.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007) 217–19; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 2: 9:51–24:53 (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) 1576–77; Jakob van Bruggen, *Christ on Earth: The Gospel Narratives as History* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 135–37; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 177–78; idem, "Matthew," in *EBC*, vol. 9: *Matthew–Mark* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) 497–98; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013) 62–64; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to John* (rev. ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995) 166–69; Robert H. Mounce, "John," in *EBC*, vol. 10: *Luke–Acts* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) 391–92; Grant R. Osborne, "The Gospel of John," in *The Gospel of John, 1–3 John* (Cornerstone Biblical Commentary 13; Carol Stream: Tyndale House, 2007) 46–47; David Secombe, *The King of God's Kingdom: A Solution to the Puzzle of Jesus* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2002) 145–46, 506–8; R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel according to St. John: An Introduction and Commentary* (INTC; London: Tyndale, 1960) 61; Merrill C. Tenney, "The Gospel of John" in *EBC*, vol. 9: *Luke–John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 44; David L. Turner, *Matthew* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008) 502; Walter W. Wessel and Mark L. Strauss, "Mark," in *EBC*, vol. 9: *Matthew–Mark* (rev. ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) 888; Michael J. Wilkins, *Matthew* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004) 689–90.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald L. Borchert, *John* (2 vols.; NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996, 2002) 1:160. Note also the claim that the occurrence of two such events "is about as probable as that the Normandy landings took place both at the beginning and the end of the Second World War" (R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text* [NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002] 438 n. 34)

<sup>5</sup> C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953) 448.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 157 n. 2.

differences in their accounts. When the assumption is made that only one such event took place, there is a tendency to treat the data without sufficient care. So it is not uncommon for discussions to downplay the extent of the differences, implying that they are relatively minor in both number and kind.<sup>7</sup> The number of similarities is also often overstated.<sup>8</sup> Those who are more impressed by the similarities argue that John is reworking Mark or the Synoptics in general,<sup>9</sup> or that John and the Synoptics are drawing on a common source.<sup>10</sup> Others give more weight to the differences, and thus argue for John's independence: "The discrepancies ... are not such as to demand different events, though they are enough to suggest that there is no literary dependence but that another channel of tradition is present."<sup>11</sup> In order to test this conclusion, we need a clear idea of what these "discrepancies" are: how many are there, and of what kind?

We can begin with the work of Leon Morris. In the course of mounting a general case for John's independence, he argued that his account of the Temple incident is not derived from the Synoptics. He based this conclusion on the following observations:<sup>12</sup>

- The most obvious difference is the fact that they locate the event at opposite ends of Jesus' ministry.
- There are only 5 words in common between the accounts (ἐξεβαλεν, κολλυβιστῶν, τραπέζας, πωλοῦντας, περιστεράς).
- John's account has 5 distinctive features: the sheep and oxen; the whip; the word κερματιστής for money-changers; the "pouring out" of the money; and the command, ἄρατε ταῦτα ἐντεῦθεν.
- Only the Synoptic account has a reference to Jesus prohibiting the carrying of vessels through the Temple area (Mark 11:16).

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<sup>7</sup> Dodd, for example, claims that John's account involves "little substantial difference from the Marcan version" (*Interpretation* 300). In similar vein, Étienne Trocmé says that the differences between Mark and John boil down to three ("ces différences se ramènent à trois"; "L'expulsion des marchands du Temple," *NTS* 15 [1968–69] 8). As we are just about to see, these judgments are wide of the mark.

<sup>8</sup> Raymond E. Brown claims that there are "many" similarities, but then can list only four (*The Gospel according to John* [2 vols.; AB 29; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966, 1970] 1:119). Note also Ben Witherington III, *John's Wisdom: A Commentary on the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995) 86 ("far too similar, even down to some details").

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John* (2d ed.; London: SPCK, 1978) 195–96; Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel according to St John* (BNTC; London: Continuum, 2005) 143; John Marsh, *The Gospel of Saint John* (Pelican Gospel Commentaries; Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1968) 163; Seeley, "Temple Act" 272–73.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Brown, *John* 1:119; Ivor Buse, "The Cleansing of the Temple in the Synoptics and John," *ExpTim* 70 (1958) 22–24; J. N. Sanders and B. A. Mastin, *A Commentary on the Gospel according to St John* (BNTC; London: A. & C. Black, 1968) 121.

<sup>11</sup> Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel according to Saint John* (3 vols.; New York: Seabury, 1968, 1980, 1982) 1:353; see also, e.g., Ádna, *Stellung* 179–90; Dodd, *Historical Tradition* 161–62; P. Gardner-Smith, *Saint John and the Synoptic Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938) 14–15; Matson, "Contribution" 495–99; Snodgrass, "Temple Incident" 443–44.

<sup>12</sup> Leon Morris, *Studies in the Fourth Gospel* (Exeter, UK: Paternoster, 1969) 26–27.

- In the Synoptic account, Jesus quotes from Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11 to explain his actions, but in John Jesus does not quote any scriptural text. Instead, the disciples recall Ps 69:9.
- In the Synoptics Jesus is objecting to dishonest conduct, but in John to the provision of animals and money-changing as such.

A more recent work notes two other distinctive items in John's account:

- The confrontation between Jesus and the "Jews" that results immediately (John 2:18–20).
- The Temple logion, which is uttered by Jesus (John 2:19), rather than by false witnesses (Mark 14:58) and scoffers (Mark 15:29).

This work also observes that only John mentions the presence of the disciples (John 2:17, 22).<sup>13</sup>

There are several more differences to be noted, which are best seen by comparing Mark's account with John's. The tally also needs to include the following:

- Mark uses καταστρέφω for the overturning of the tables, while John uses ἀνατρέπω.
- While both accounts refer to τοὺς πωλοῦντας, only Mark refers to τοὺς ἀγοράζοντας as well (Mark 11:15).
- Only Mark reports that Jesus overturned τὰς καθέδρας of those selling doves (Mark 11:15).
- Only in John does Jesus refer to the Temple as "my Father's house" (τὸν οἶκον τοῦ πατρὸς μου, John 2:16).
- John's account specifies the reactions of both the disciples and the "Jews" (John 2:17–18), with the latter addressing Jesus directly; in Mark, however, the reactions noted are those of the leadership (the chief priests and scribes) and the crowd (Mark 11:18)—and the leaders do not address Jesus personally.

Some of these differences are admittedly quite minor, such as the choice of different verbs for the overturning of the tables. But most have more substance, and there are too many of them to discount. There is, in fact, very little in common between the accounts. They share only seven words, and "it would be practically impossible to tell a story of temple cleansing without them."<sup>14</sup>

The belief that there was only one Temple event is so widely accepted, however, that merely listing differences between the accounts is unlikely to be sufficient. Perhaps the following way of recording the differences will prove to be more effective in demonstrating the weaknesses of the majority view. As the longest of the Synoptic accounts, Mark's story has been chosen for comparison with John's. (The table focuses only on the actual pericopes [Mark 11:15–18; John 2:13–22], and does not consider other differences to do with their setting in their respective narratives.)

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<sup>13</sup> Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells With Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2001) 65.

<sup>14</sup> Morris, *Studies* 26. His claim that there are only five words in common overlooks τὸ ἱερόν and ὁ οἶκος.

Chart 1: Comparison between the Markan and Johannine Accounts  
of the Temple Cleansing

The Markan Account	The Johannine Account
Jesus entered the Temple	Jesus found in the Temple sellers of cattle, sheep and doves, and money-changers
He drove out the sellers and buyers	He made a whip, and drove out all the animals
	He poured out the money-changers' money
He overturned the money-changers' tables	He overturned their tables
[He overturned] the dove-sellers' seats	He told the dove-sellers to remove their goods
He prevented anyone from carrying vessels through the Temple area.	
In his teaching he said, "Is it not written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'? But you have made it a den of robbers."	[He told the dove-sellers], "Stop making my Father's house a market."
	His disciples recalled that it is written, "Zeal for your house will consume me."
When they heard this, the chief priests and scribes were looking for a way to destroy him. They feared him, because the crowd was astounded at his teaching.	The "Jews" said, "What sign do you show us for doing these things?"
	Jesus gave an enigmatic response, referring to the destruction and raising of "this Temple"
	The "Jews" reply in a way that shows they have misunderstood the point of Jesus' words

In summary, what the accounts have in common is this: at Passover, Jesus entered the Temple area, and dramatically interrupted the activities that enabled pilgrims to the festival to procure sacrificial animals or birds and to change their money for payment of the Temple-tax.

The differences between the accounts are considerable, and can be summarized as follows. The actions Jesus took

- affected different *groups*: sellers and buyers *versus* sellers;
- by different *methods*: expelling sellers and buyers *versus* driving out animals with a whip;
- affected different *objects*: tables and chairs *versus* money and tables;
- involved different *bans*: prohibiting anyone carrying any vessel through the Temple courts *versus* instructing dove-sellers to remove their goods;

- were accompanied by different *complaints*: the house of prayer for all nations turned into a robbers' den *versus* his Father's house turned into a market; and
- were linked with different *biblical texts*: Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11 *versus* Ps 69:9.

In addition, Jesus' actions and words

- had a different *impact*: planning to destroy him (leaders), and stunned by his teaching (crowd) *versus* recalling a Scripture text (disciples), and demanding a sign (the "Jews");
- on different *groups*: the leaders and the crowd *versus* his disciples and the leaders (the "Jews").

Comparing the two accounts in this way makes it clear that despite many claims to the contrary, they have not much in common, and a great many differences. The most likely explanation for such a combination is not that two independent sources are reporting the same event from different perspectives, but that two different events are being reported.<sup>15</sup>

This conclusion leads to an obvious and important question: do these episodes have the same significance? The widespread assumption that this event occurred only once means that this question does not usually come up for consideration. It also means that there is a tendency to read John's account through the lens of those in the Synoptics, with the result that the differences are largely overlooked. Yet if Jesus interrupted activities in the Temple at the beginning of his ministry and also at the end, it is more likely than not that whatever their similarities, the two events were also intended to convey somewhat different messages. We will return to this point when we come to the fourth step in our argument, but for now will make just one observation. It seems clear that whatever else it may mean, the event the Synoptics report is a symbolic enactment of judgment on the Temple.<sup>16</sup> Three factors point us in this direction: Jesus' allusion to Jeremiah's judgment oracle against the Temple (Mark 11:17, alluding to Jer 7:11); what he does in conjunction with this event (Mark 11:12–14 and parallels); and what he teaches in this period (Mark 13:1–2 and parallels; Luke 19:41–44). It is difficult to understand why Jesus would speak and act against the Temple in this way if this was the first visit of his

<sup>15</sup> After setting out all the differences carefully, Matson ("Contribution" 499) concludes that "despite the differences ... they describe the same event." We see much the same in Jacob Chanikuzhy's discussion (*Jesus, the Eschatological Temple: An Exegetical Study of Jn 2,13–22 in the Light of the pre-70 C.E. Eschatological Temple Hopes and the Synoptic Temple Action* [CBET 58; Leuven: Peeters, 2012] 97–99). This shows how strong the belief is that there could only have been one Temple event. One is left wondering what amount of evidence would be required to produce the conclusion that different events were involved.

<sup>16</sup> This is widely held, even though there are different ways of understanding the basis and implications of this judgment. Important examples of this interpretation are Michael F. Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission* (LNTS 331; London: T&T Clark, 2007) 143–55; Steven M. Bryan, *Jesus and Israel's Traditions of Judgment and Restoration* (SNTSMS 117; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 220–25; Brant Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of Exile: Restoration Eschatology and the Origin of the Atonement* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005) 371–76; E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1985) 61–76; N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Christian Origins and the Question of God 2; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996) 414–24.

ministry. How can such condemnation be warranted if Jerusalem and its leadership have had no opportunity to respond to him and his message? But his stance is understandable if he has met rejection there previously. We will come back to this point below.

## II. EXPLAINING THE JOHANNINE SETTING

The second step in our argument involves challenging the widely held view that John had theological reasons for moving this event to the beginning of Jesus' ministry. Scholars generally see no problem here, on the grounds that the Gospel writers often arrange material thematically rather than chronologically.<sup>17</sup> That this occurs in the Gospels is obvious enough—but is there any parallel for such a major departure from the actual order of events? It is one thing to recognize, for example, that Matthew has grouped together a series of miracle stories without any regard for their precise chronological setting (Matt 8:1–9:34). This is only a matter, first, of not recording specific dates and times for the events being reported, and second, of selecting representative incidents from the early stages of Jesus' ministry. All we get is a rough idea of when they happened—but a rough idea is all that we need. But to bring forward to the beginning of Jesus' ministry an event that occurred only at the end—and, what is more, an event that played a significant part in bringing his ministry to an end—is not at all the same kind of thing. This does not give us just a rough idea of what happened; it gives us the wrong idea.

Such a conclusion is usually excluded in advance by a particular view of John's intentions: "the 'two cleansings' approach is fundamentally wrong-headed and fails to take into account the essentially *theological* agenda that John is pursuing throughout the compilation of his Gospel. The general agreement here is that the Evangelist has abandoned chronology in the interests of his Christology."<sup>18</sup> Despite the frequency with which such a view is expressed, it involves some significant problems. First, where else has John "abandoned chronology" so completely for obviously theological reasons? If he believed that theology trumps chronology in this way, and took this approach "throughout the compilation of his Gospel," there is no obvious reason why he would have treated only one episode in this fashion. But are there any other instances of such major departures from the actual course of events?<sup>19</sup> This raises the question, if John has not done this anywhere else, has

<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., Gary M. Burge, *John* (NIVAC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) 95; John F. McHugh, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on John 1–4* (ICC; London: T&T Clark, 2009) 202; Rodney A. Whitacre, *John* (IVPNTC; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999) 82.

<sup>18</sup> Larry J. Kreitzer, "The Temple Incident of John 2.13–25: A Preview of What is To Come," in *Understanding, Studying and Reading: NT Essays in Honour of John Ashton* (ed. Christopher Rowland and Crispin H. T. Fletcher-Louis; JSNTSup 153; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998) 94 (italics his).

<sup>19</sup> John is widely held to have brought the crucifixion forward by a day, again for theological reasons. This is very different from bringing an event forward by several years. (It is by no means certain, however, that John has altered the date of the crucifixion: see Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel* [Leicester, UK: Apollos, 2001] 187, 237–39, 246–47; Carson, *John* 455–58, 475, 589–90, 603–5, 622; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John* [BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004] 400 n. 1, 401–2, 524, 537–38.)

he done it at all? That is, can we be sure that this episode does not belong where John has put it?

This brings us to a second problem with this approach. If this is the only part of the Jesus story that John has used in this way, there must be something about it that made it especially suitable for such treatment. But what is that? What theological point does John see in this episode that made him regard it as an ideal introduction to the story of Jesus' public ministry? Perhaps the most common answer has to do with the fact that the Temple incident foreshadows Jesus' death and resurrection, telling us that the whole of his ministry must be read in the light of the Passion narrative.<sup>20</sup> Another view sees the incident as "programmatic to the Johannine presentation of the relationship between Jesus and Judaism," foreshadowing the way his whole ministry involved conflict between himself and the Jewish leadership—a conflict that ended in his death.<sup>21</sup> A third approach focuses more on what Jesus meant for his Jewish environment. One version points to this event as introducing the theme of Jesus as the new Temple, where God is present and his glory revealed (John 1:14).<sup>22</sup> Another connects it with the way Jesus marks the beginning of a new age in which worship will not involve the Temple (John 4:21–24).<sup>23</sup> A

<sup>20</sup> So, e.g., John Ashton, *Understanding the Fourth Gospel* (2d ed.; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 338; Jürgen Becker, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (2 vols.; Ökumenischer Taschenbuch-Kommentar zum Neuen Testament; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1979) 1:126–27; John Dennis, *Jesus' Death and the Gathering of the True Israel: The Johannine Appropriation of Restoration Theology in the Light of John 11.47–52* (WUNT 2/217; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006) 165–73; Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (2 vols.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003) 1:519; Kreitzer, "Temple Incident" 97–98; Marsh, *John* 162–64; Udo Schnelle, "Die Tempelreinigung und die Christologie des Johannesevangeliums," *NTS* 42 (1996) 360–65; idem, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (3rd ed.; THKNT; Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2004) 75, 77; idem, "Cross and Resurrection in the Gospel of John," in *The Resurrection of Jesus in the Gospel of John* (ed. Craig R. Koester and Reimund Bieringer; WUNT 222; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008) 137; Derek Tovey, *Narrative Art and Act in the Fourth Gospel* (JSNTSup 151; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997) 233–42; Ulrich Wilckens, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (2d ed.; NTD; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000) 60; Jean Zumstein, *L'Évangile selon Saint Jean (1–12)* (CNT; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2014) 102, 107.

<sup>21</sup> Kim Huat Tan, *The Zion Traditions and the Aims of Jesus* (SNTSMS 91; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 162; see also Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture: Restoring the Portrait from the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) 427; Frederick Dale Bruner, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012) 150; Christian Dietzfelbinger, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (2 vols.; ZBNT; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 2001) 1:77; Lincoln, *John* 142; Mark A. Matson, "The Temple Incident: An Integral Element in the Fourth Gospel's Narrative," in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition* (ed. Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher; Louisville: WJK, 2001) 149–50; F. J. Moloney, "Reading John 2:13–22: The Purification of the Temple," *RB* 97 (1990) 439; Gail R. O'Day, "The Gospel of John: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," *NIB* 9:491–865 ("the challenge and threat that new life poses to the existing order," 543); Robert H. Stein, *Jesus the Messiah: A Survey of the Life of Christ* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996) 186–87; Hartwig Thyen, *Das Johannes-evangelium* (HNT; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) 180.

<sup>22</sup> Coloe, *God Dwells* 81, 84; Paul M. Hoskins, *Jesus as the Fulfillment of the Temple in the Gospel of John* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006) 116, 146; Schnelle, "Tempelreinigung" 367–71; Peter W. L. Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City: NT Perspectives on Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 174–75.

<sup>23</sup> George R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (2d ed.; WBC 36; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1999) 39, 42; Dodd, *Interpretation* 303 ("a new order in religion"); R. H. Lightfoot, *St. John's Gospel: A Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956) 114; Marsh, *John* 164; Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: A Theological Commentary*



third version sees this event as inaugurating “a theme of ‘replacement’ by Jesus in regard to Israel’s sacred space, feast days, and sacred objects.”<sup>24</sup>

All of these explanations share the same difficulty: if John was looking for a suitable event to headline his account of Jesus’ public ministry, the Temple incident was not his only option. Other parts of his narrative offer good alternatives. If he wanted to show that the whole story is overshadowed by Jesus’ “hour,” he could have begun with the synagogue discourse in chapter 6 or the good shepherd passage in chapter 10. If he wanted to make it clear that this was going to be a story about conflict, with opposition from the Jewish leadership that would eventually lead to Jesus’ death, he could have begun with chapter 5 or chapter 8. If he wanted to show that the new age established by Jesus meant major changes for Judaism, he could have begun with the Nicodemus episode (John 2:23–3:21). The wine miracle at Cana (John 2:1–11) has already pointed us in this direction anyway. In each case, other parts of John’s narrative carry a similar meaning to that found in the Temple event, and could therefore have served the same purpose.

We can go further than this. If John felt free to construct his story this way, why did he not begin it with the raising of Lazarus? What a superb introduction to a narrative focusing on Jesus as the giver of life (John 1:4; 3:16; 10:10; 20:31)! If it be objected that the Lazarus story has to come where it does because this was the trigger that precipitated Jesus’ downfall, there is a fairly obvious reply. The Temple incident needs to stay at the end of the story because it had a lot to do with the ending of Jesus’ ministry! If John feels free to move the Temple story, why not the Lazarus story instead? Or what about chapter 9, with Jesus giving sight to a blind man and being opposed by self-styled “disciples of Moses”? What a great way to introduce the narrative of the “Light of the world” (John 1:4–9; 8:12; 9:5), the one who both fulfills and surpasses all that Moses said and did (John 1:17; 5:46). This would be particularly appropriate in view of the way the Prologue speaks of John as sent to witness to the Light (John 1:6–8). So chapter 9 could have been placed where chapter 2 is, after the account of John’s testimony and its repercussions (John 1:19–51). This would also be a very effective way of making it clear from the outset that Jesus would be fiercely opposed by Jewish leaders—an opposition that would eventually lead to his death. And so we could go on.

The more we read John’s narrative from this perspective, the more obvious it becomes that there is nothing inevitable about using the Temple event to headline an account of Jesus’ ministry. And this can only raise doubts about whether that is what John was doing.

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(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 120; Schnackenburg, *John* 1:356; Schnelle, *Johannes* 77; Mark W. G. Stibbe, *John* (Readings; Sheffield: JSOT, 1993) 49.

<sup>24</sup> Jerome H. Neyrey, *The Gospel of John* (NCBC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 70; cf. Witherington, *John’s Wisdom* 37.

## III. SEVEN SIGNIFICANT DETAILS

We come now to the third step in our argument. This concerns the fact that there are details in the Gospels which make good sense if the incident recorded in John 2 occurred at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. There are seven to be considered, three of them in John's narrative.

The first is the reference to "forty-six years" (John 2:20). Evidence in Josephus enables us to date the commencement of Herod's building work on the Temple to 20/19 BC, and its completion a year and a half later to 18/17 BC.<sup>25</sup> If the statement made by the "Jews" means that the building work had been done forth-six years previously, this would date the incident John records to around AD 28.<sup>26</sup> If the statement means that the building work had been under way for forty-six years, this gives us a date a year or two earlier.<sup>27</sup> Either way, this puts the event early in Jesus' ministry and some years before the crucifixion. This results in what one study calls "a surprising corroboration of the Johannine chronology!"<sup>28</sup>

The second item is what Jesus says when he is called upon to produce a sign (John 2:18). His response is enigmatic, a *mashal* whose meaning is not self-evident (John 2:19).<sup>29</sup> With help from John (John 2:21), the reader knows what to make of it, but the "Jews" misunderstand Jesus (John 2:20). Here a comparison with the Synoptics is helpful. They, too, report an occasion in the early stages of Jesus' ministry when he makes an enigmatic allusion to his coming death (Matt 9:15; Mark 2:20; Luke 5:35).<sup>30</sup> However, things are very different when we come to his final week in Jerusalem. His references to his approaching death are much less indirect: he is the vineyard owner's son who is to be killed by the tenants (Matt 21:37–39; Mark 12:6–8; Luke 20:13–15); he is the stone rejected by the builders but made by God into the cornerstone (Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10–11; Luke 20:17). And the Jewish leaders are not puzzled by his words, but are in no doubt as to his meaning (Matt 21:45; Mark 12:12; Luke 20:19). The indirect and enigmatic reference in John 2:18–20 to Jesus' death and resurrection thus fits an early date rather than a setting in the final week of his ministry.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 15.380, 421.

<sup>26</sup> See Barrett, *John* 200; J. B. Lightfoot, *Biblical Essays* (1904; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994) 30–31; Robinson, *Priority* 130 nn. 18, 19; Schnackenburg, *John* 1:351; G. Schrenk, "τὸ ἱερόν," *TDNT* 3:233. This way of translating the verse is argued by Daniel B. Wallace (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the NT* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996] 560–61).

<sup>27</sup> This is the way most understand the statement, but it relies on unusual uses of the aorist tense and the dative case.

<sup>28</sup> Antony Therat, *Jerusalem in the Gospel of John: An Exegetical and Theological Inquiry into Johannine Geography* (New Delhi: Intercultural, 1997) 72 n. 28. The claim that this dating "does not fit the facts" (Francis J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* [SacPag; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1998] 82) invites the rejoinder that the reference to forty-six years is one of the facts that our hypotheses must fit!

<sup>29</sup> In the Synoptics, he makes a similarly cryptic allusion to his death and resurrection when asked for a sign (Matt 12:38–40; Luke 11:16, 29).

<sup>30</sup> On the authenticity of Jesus' predictions of his death and resurrection see Michael R. Licona, "Did Jesus Predict his Death and Vindication/Resurrection?," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 8 (2010) 47–66.

<sup>31</sup> Braun, "L'expulsion" 198–99.

The third matter is John's report that the "Jews" were determined to kill Jesus (John 5:18). As a result of his violation of the Sabbath regulations, they began to take action against him (ἐδίωκον, John 5:16). Because he responded with a claim that they regarded as blasphemous (John 5:17), they were now looking to apply the death penalty. John's wording (μᾶλλον ἐζήτουν, John 5:18) suggests that Jesus' claim increased a determination they already possessed, as μᾶλλον is most likely functioning as an intensifier ("even more").<sup>32</sup> This raises an obvious question: why had they already decided upon this course of action? Where else had Jesus made what they would have regarded as a blasphemous claim? The only answer we get is in John 2:16, where Jesus spoke of the Temple as his Father's house. This makes it clear that he saw himself as entitled to exercise control over what happened there because he was the unique Son of Israel's God, sharing in his sovereignty.<sup>33</sup> This involves the same claim (πατέρα ἰδίου ἔλεγεν τὸν θεόν, 5:18) that appalled them subsequently. Why then is there no indication that the authorities were incensed at hearing blasphemy on the first occasion?

To answer this question we need a clear picture of the likely course of events. How would the "Jews" have known about what Jesus did? By οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι (John 2:18), John is referring to the Jewish leadership, and especially to the Temple authorities.<sup>34</sup> While they were undoubtedly in or near the Temple complex, they were unlikely to have been present among the crowds. They had no need to keep watch over what went on. A cohort of Roman troops was stationed in the Antonia fortress overlooking the Temple, and during the festivals armed soldiers stood guard on the Temple porticoes.<sup>35</sup> Then there were the Levites who served as the Temple police, and who were stationed at the various gateways or patrolled the Temple courts.<sup>36</sup> These could be relied upon to bring any trouble to the attention of the

<sup>32</sup> BDAG 613; Keener, *John* 1:647. Most commentators see μᾶλλον as meaning "rather, instead" and thus as serving to contrast the differing severity of the policies of vv. 16 and 18 (so, e.g., Lagrange, *Jean* 142; Morris, *John* 275 n. 52; Schnackenburg, *John* 2:462 n. 31; Wengst, *Johannes* 1:205; Westcott, *John* 84). One argument for taking it this way is that there has been no previous mention of the authorities seeking to apply the death penalty to Jesus (Edwin A. Abbott, *Johannine Grammar* [London: Adam & Charles Black, 1906] 568). However, since they are reacting to exactly the same claim that Jesus has made already (John 2:16), it makes good sense to see μᾶλλον ἐζήτουν as looking back to that earlier situation. Anderson points out that the severity of their reaction suggests an earlier provocation (*Fourth Gospel* 158).

<sup>33</sup> For evidence that claiming to share in God's unique authority would be seen as blasphemy, see Darrell Bock, "Blasphemy and the Jewish Examination of Jesus," in *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence* (ed. Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 618–22.

<sup>34</sup> Although there is much debate about the meaning of this term in John, there is good reason to understand it in this way here: see Johannes Beutler, *Judaism and the Jews in the Gospel of John* (Subsidia Biblica 30; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 2006) 148; Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971) 124; Schnackenburg, *John* 1:348; Urban C. von Wahlde, "The Johannine 'Jews': A Critical Survey," *NTS* 28 (1982) 41–42, 47–48. In John 1:19 they are the Jerusalem-based authorities who send priests and Levites—and also Pharisees (1:24)—to question John. We also find this use of the term in John 5:10, 15, 16, 18; 7:1, 11, 13, 15; 9:18, 22; 18:12, 14, 31, 36, 38; 19:7, 14, 31, 38; 20:19.

<sup>35</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 20.106–7; *J.W.* 2.224; 5.244–45.

<sup>36</sup> Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 1.156; m. Mid. 1.1. See Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the NT Period* (London: SCM, 1969) 160–63, 209–10; Emil

authorities, especially the captain of the Temple, who was second in rank only to the high priest and had oversight of these guards and power of arrest.<sup>37</sup> So the “Jews” were unlikely to have witnessed Jesus’ intervention, but would have learned about it when they received a report of his conduct from their police. Their response (ἀπεκρίθησαν, John 2:18) was thus not an immediate reaction to what they themselves had seen and heard. It was more likely to have been based on what they had just been told.<sup>38</sup> What the police would have reported on was the disturbance, and that is why the authorities are focused on what Jesus did (ταῦτα ποιεῖς, John 2:18). They may not have learned about what he said (to the dove-sellers) until later on, when the merchants and money-changers lodged a complaint against him.<sup>39</sup> So their failure to react against what they would have regarded as a blasphemous claim (John 2:16) is due to the fact that it was not made in their hearing, but was probably brought to their attention only some time later.<sup>40</sup> However, John implies that they have reached this conclusion by the time we get to the events in chapter 5, which serve to harden their resolve to take action against Jesus (John 5:18). The almost incidental way in which John makes this comment makes best sense if the Temple event belongs where he has located it.

The fourth detail is the unexplained emergence of very strong Jerusalem-based opposition to Jesus not long into his Galilean ministry. Mark 3:22 reports that a group of scribes from Jerusalem denounce Jesus as a tool and ally of demonic powers. No explanation is given of either their presence in Galilee or the severity of their condemnation of Jesus. One possibility is that like the crowds (Mark 3:8), they have come because they have heard about his activities and want to see what is going on. But they do not appear to be neutral observers, in the process of working out what to make of him. Instead, they are already opposed to him, and in the strongest possible terms.<sup>41</sup> This would make sense if they had encountered Jesus in Jerusalem, where he acted in ways they have come to regard as completely intolerable. While it is possible to envisage other catalysts that might have led them to this

Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* (175 B.C.–A.D. 135) (ed. Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, Matthew Black; 4 vols.; rev. ed.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1973–87) 2:277–78, 284–87.

<sup>37</sup> See Acts 4:1; 5:24, 26; Josephus, *Ant.* 20.131, 208; *J.W.* 2.409; 6.294.

<sup>38</sup> Note John 5:19, where ἀπεκρίνατο designates Jesus’ response. This, too, is not an immediate reaction to a particular statement or action; it is his answer to the policy the authorities have adopted and the actions that flow from it and make it evident.

<sup>39</sup> Schnackenburg, *John* 1:347; cf. Craig A. Evans: “His words and actions would eventually have been passed on to anxious temple authorities” (*Mark 8:27–16:20* [WBC 34B; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2001] 167); Alexander J. M. Wedderburn, “Jesus’ Action in the Temple: A Key or a Puzzle?” *ZNW* 97 (2006) 8.

<sup>40</sup> This is a more likely explanation than the claim that “John takes one thing at a time” (Barrett, *John* 198). He is bearing witness (21:24), not creating a narrative—and true testimony to the Word-become-flesh must involve more than valid insights; it must also include reliable reporting.

<sup>41</sup> This hostile opposition continues throughout Jesus’ ministry (Mark 7:1–13; 8:31; 10:33; 11:18, 27–28; 14:1, 43, 53; 15:1). These scribes are likely to be emissaries (or perhaps even members) of the Sanhedrin (Mark 14:53, 55; 15:1), so that their pronouncement sounds rather like an official verdict. On scribes as members of the Sanhedrin, see Jeremias, *Jerusalem* 233–37; Schürer, *History* 2:213.

view, the Temple incident reported by John fits the bill quite nicely.<sup>42</sup> The more the authorities reflected on what Jesus had said and done on that occasion, the more likely they were to be hostile toward him.

The fifth item is Jesus' lament over Jerusalem (Matt 23:37–39; Luke 13:34–35). Although other possibilities have been suggested,<sup>43</sup> the most natural way of taking ποσάκις ἠθέλησα is that Jesus not only experienced this desire but also gave expression to it by visiting Jerusalem several times.<sup>44</sup> This is one of a number of hints in the Synoptics that he has been to Jerusalem prior to the visit that comes at the end of his ministry.<sup>45</sup> And while ὁ οἶκος ὑμῶν could be understood in several ways, in this context it is most likely a reference to the Temple.<sup>46</sup> The fact that this saying comes immediately after Jesus' ποσάκις ἠθέλησα saying implies that the Temple featured in his activities in Jerusalem. It also implies that Jerusalem's rejection of his message and ministry (οὐκ ἠελησάτε) is the major reason why the Temple is now under judgment: the Shekinah has departed (hence ἔρημος), so that it is no longer God's house but only theirs. This explains why on his final visit Jesus both symbolized and announced the overthrow of the Temple. What he says here shows that this did not come out of the blue: it was the inevitable outcome of the rejection he had experienced on previous visits.<sup>47</sup>

The sixth of these details is the disagreement between the witnesses at Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin. In Mark's account of the trial, those who give evidence against Jesus cannot agree over what he actually said about the Temple (Mark

<sup>42</sup> This connection is made by Paul N. Anderson, *The Riddles of the Fourth Gospel: An Introduction to John* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011) 210; Lewis A. Muirhead, *The Message of the Fourth Gospel* (Crown Theological Library; London: Williams & Norgate, 1925) 47; Tasker, *John* 61.

<sup>43</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison Jr. list six possible interpretations (*The Gospel according to Saint Matthew* [3 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988–1997] 3:321). Another can now be added, according to which the saying refers to Jesus' preexistent activity throughout Israel's history (Simon J. Gathercole, *The Pre-Existent Son: Recovering the Christologies of Matthew, Mark, and Luke* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006] 210–21). This is less likely than a reference to previous visits to Jerusalem which Matthew has chosen not to report.

<sup>44</sup> "It would be strange if he who wept over the city had never sought to win it" (Henry Scott Holland, *The Fourth Gospel* [London: John Murray, 1923] 35). See also R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007) 883; Seán Freyne, *The Jesus Movement and its Expansion: Meaning and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014) 178; Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on his Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 473; Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew* (ZECNT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010) 862. The claim that these cannot be the words of the historical Jesus because he was active in Jerusalem only once (Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: A Commentary* [Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005] 160) rather begs the question.

<sup>45</sup> On which see Blomberg, *Reliability of the Gospels* 215–16; Morris, *Studies* 43–44; Robinson, *Priority* 125–26; William Sanday, *The Authorship and Historical Character of the Fourth Gospel Considered in Reference to the Contents of the Gospel Itself: A Critical Essay* (London, Macmillan, 1872) 55–57.

<sup>46</sup> François Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51–19:27* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013) 330; Davies and Allison, *Matthew* 3:322; Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 559; Tan, *Zion Traditions* 113–15; Wright, *Victory* 571 n. 120.

<sup>47</sup> It is just possible that Jesus' καθ' ἡμέραν (Matt 26:55; Mark 14:49; Luke 22:53) suggests other, earlier visits to the Temple in addition to the couple of days involved in the Synoptic accounts of this final visit (so, e.g., C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* [CGTC; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966] 437; Evans, *Mark* 426).

14:56–59). This is much more likely if they are referring to something he said a couple of years before, but difficult to understand if the words in question were spoken only a few days previously.<sup>48</sup> Mark does not in fact record a saying of Jesus that has any resemblance to the allegations made at the trial. The only basis for their words is the saying recorded in John 2:19, which therefore makes best sense where John has located it.

The seventh detail is the marked increase in “temperature” in the Synoptic accounts of Jesus’ intervention in the Temple. Jesus’ words (Mark 11:17) are more severely critical and confrontational than those in John 2:16. In addition, the reaction of the authorities is markedly different: in John 2, they demand a sign (v. 18); in Mark 11 they have determined to get rid of Jesus (v. 18). All of this fits a situation in which a largely unknown Jesus dramatically interrupts the business of the Temple, and several years later, a very well-known Jesus reappears for what both he and the authorities know will be the final showdown.

On their own, none of these details is conclusive, but together they give us good reason to ask whether John’s report of an early Temple event might not be right.

#### IV. JESUS AND HIS MISSION

This brings us to the fourth step in our argument, which concerns the way John’s location of the Temple incident can be seen to fit with Jesus’ convictions about his mission to Israel. The best way into this matter is to consider how modern studies of the Gospels answer two fundamentally important questions: what sense of mission did Jesus have, and how did his ministry express it? Naturally, these require careful and extensive discussion, but in this context we will have to limit ourselves to just two examples.<sup>49</sup>

The first is a major study of Jesus’ aims which sees his “public career as a divine mission to Israel.”<sup>50</sup> It understands the Temple event at the end of his ministry in light of his gospel of the kingdom, arguing that what he did “epitomized in action the message ‘The reign of God is at hand!’ and the demand ‘Repent!’” so as to bring “the imminence of God’s reign abruptly, forcefully, to the attention of all. As

<sup>48</sup> Blomberg, *Reliability of the Gospels* 217–18; Braun, “L’expulsion” 196–97; W. F. Howard, “The Position of the Temple Cleansing in the Fourth Gospel,” *ExpTim* 44 (1933) 284; Morris, *John* 168; Robinson, *Priority* 128.

<sup>49</sup> It is important to acknowledge that we cannot hope to do justice to these matters in such a brief discussion. Many of the issues involved are complex, and there is a very wide range of competing views. Even restricting our focus to the meaning of Jesus’ intervention in the Temple faces us with what one survey refers to as an “almost limitless” multitude of interpretations (“nahezu grenzenlos”: Christina Metzendorf, *Die Tempelaktion Jesu: Patristische und historisch-kritische Exegese im Vergleich* [WUNT 2/168; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003] 257). All we can do here is to sketch an approach that hopefully will commend itself by making sense of what the Gospels tell us.

<sup>50</sup> Ben F. Meyer, *The Aims of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1979) 169. See also Steven M. Bryan, “Jesus and Israel’s Eschatological Constitution,” in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 3:2835–53; idem, *Israel’s Traditions*.

proclamation, demand, and warning, it said what Jesus had always said.”<sup>51</sup> But it is difficult to see why he would say this throughout his ministry but wait until right at the end to say it in Jerusalem. Why would a “divine mission to Israel” involve only one final announcement and enactment of this gospel at the center of Israel’s life? Why would Galilee have plenty of opportunity to hear his gospel when Jerusalem received only what amounted to a last-minute ultimatum? This question becomes even more pressing when the fundamental importance of the Temple is acknowledged: “The temple was central not only to the cultic but to the political, commercial, financial, and social organization of national life.”<sup>52</sup> But if the Temple was so central to Israel’s life, and if Jesus had a mission to Israel, why would he ignore its center and focal point until the end of his ministry? This question becomes more pressing still when we recognize that “Israel” cannot be confined to the Jews who live in Palestine. If Jesus’ “divine mission” was to all the people of Israel, what better way of reaching those of them in the Diaspora than by coming to Jerusalem and the Temple at the great festivals? This, of course, is just what John shows him doing (John 2:13; 5:1; 7:10–14; 10:22–23; 12:12).

Our second example is a study of the place of the Zion traditions in Jesus’ ministry. This points out that Zion was “a tenacious and living national and eschatological symbol,” “the symbol of the life, beliefs and hopes of all Jews.”<sup>53</sup> It also notes that “Jerusalem was important to the historical Jesus.” The obvious connection between his gospel of the kingdom of God and Jerusalem’s status as “the city of the great king” (Matt 5:35) meant that it “exercised a pull on Jesus”: “Jerusalem was to Jesus a magnet.”<sup>54</sup> But if so, why would he resist this “pull” until the very end of his ministry? Why not announce and demonstrate the reign of the great king in his city—and do so early on? We are given a partial answer in the claim that “Jesus’ appropriation of the Zion traditions explains why he understood that the climax of his ministry and his death had to take place nowhere else except in Jerusalem.”<sup>55</sup> However, it is not clear why the Zion traditions would lead Jesus to conclude that it was only the climax and end of his ministry that should take place in Jerusalem. If Jerusalem was important to him, and if as Zion it represented “the life, beliefs and hopes of all Jews,” it is difficult to see why he would have avoided it throughout his ministry and gone there only at the end. Surely Zion as well as Galilee should hear his gospel (Isa 52:7).<sup>56</sup> And if the Zion traditions are a vital key to

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<sup>51</sup> Meyer, *Aims* 197.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 182.

<sup>53</sup> Tan, *Zion Traditions* 50, 51. See also Sean Freyne, *Jesus, A Jewish Galilean: A New Reading of the Jesus Story* (London: T&T Clark, 2004) 92–121.

<sup>54</sup> The quotations are from *Zion Traditions* 98, 99, but similar statements are made throughout (e.g. pp. 77, 126, 129–31, 155–57, 193, 231, 233). Tan devotes a chapter to a study of the authenticity and meaning of Matt 5:35 (pp. 81–99).

<sup>55</sup> *Zion Traditions* 235.

<sup>56</sup> “That message must be preached and its content fulfilled in the heart of Jewry, Zion itself” (*Zion Traditions* 192). Quite so—but why only at the end of Jesus’ ministry? This question becomes more pressing when Tan accepts that Jesus visited Jerusalem on more than one occasion (pp. 155–56).

understanding Jesus' ministry, why would he not begin that ministry in the city which is the subject of those traditions?

For all their value, both studies involve a surprising omission. They generate an important question that they do not go on to answer: why did Jerusalem and the Temple feature only at the end of Jesus' ministry? It is not difficult to understand why Jesus would have expected his ministry to come to its climax in Jerusalem, with all of the momentous implications that this held both for himself and for Israel. But it is not at all obvious why he would have ignored Jerusalem until then. If he had "a national vision for Israel" and was engaged in "the eschatological reconstitution of Israel around himself," why would he confine his activities to Galilee and its environs?<sup>57</sup> If he had a mission to Israel, why would he not spend significant amounts of time in and around Jerusalem?<sup>58</sup> After all, Galileans in large numbers went to Jerusalem for the festivals.<sup>59</sup> As we have noted, the same is true of Jews from the Diaspora.<sup>60</sup> So why would Jerusalem have to wait until the end? Indeed, in view of its fundamental importance in Jewish life, why would it not feature at the beginning? Is there any reason why, in launching his ministry, Jesus would not have gone "directly to Jerusalem, there to announce his message about the imminent arrival of God's kingly rule?"<sup>61</sup>

Because this question is seldom asked, it is difficult to find a study that gives a compelling answer. One that seeks to do so suggests that Jesus chose to focus his work in Galilee, the region of the lost northern tribes, because he was expecting the restoration of all Israel.<sup>62</sup> However, there is no obvious indication in the Gospels that points us in this direction. Another explanation looks to the Caesarea Philippi episode (Mark 8:27–9:1 and parallels): "once Jesus had been seen as the king-in-waiting, the natural decision was to go to the city which, since the time of David, had been irrevocably associated with Israel's kings."<sup>63</sup> But if Jesus had been aware of his "messianic vocation" since the time of his baptism, why did Jerusalem have to wait until the disciples recognized him as Messiah? Why withhold from Jerusalem the "messianic praxis" that characterized his ministry in Galilee?<sup>64</sup> Was this

<sup>57</sup> The quotations are from Scot McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel: The Teaching of Jesus in National Context* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 10; Wright, *Victory* 261.

<sup>58</sup> "If Jesus was concerned with Israel as a whole, it was indispensable for him to minister in the southern region as well" (Joachim Gnlika, *Jesus of Nazareth: Message and History* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997] 191–92); cf. Fredriksen, "Historical Jesus" 274.

<sup>59</sup> Josephus, *Ant.* 17.254, 20.118; *J.W.* 2.43, 232. See Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee* (SNTSMS 118; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) 54–55; Seán Freyne, *Galilee from Alexander the Great to Hadrian, 323 B.C.E. to 135 C.E.: A Study in Second Temple Judaism* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1980) 287–93.

<sup>60</sup> It has been estimated that 50,000 of these pilgrims would have been in attendance at Passover (Alan R. Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus' Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John* [JSNTSup 220; London: Sheffield Academic, 2002] 40–42).

<sup>61</sup> Freyne, *Jesus Movement* 139.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 139–46. A similar answer has been given by Jens Schröter ("Jesus of Galilee: The Role of Location in Understanding Jesus," in *Jesus Research: An International Perspective* [ed. James H. Charlesworth and Petr Pokorný; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009] 54–55).

<sup>63</sup> Wright, *Victory* 528–29.

<sup>64</sup> The quotations are from *ibid.* 537, 530.



because a visit to Jerusalem was necessarily climactic, “the symbol and embodiment of YHWH’s return to Zion”?<sup>65</sup> But is there anything about this return that required all of its purposes to be accomplished at once? If the kingdom and salvation bound up with the return could be announced and demonstrated in Galilee before being finally enacted and accomplished in Jerusalem, is there any reason why Jerusalem could not have the same opportunity as that given to Galilee? That is, why could Jerusalem not be introduced to Jesus and his mission before the visit that brought everything to a decisive climax?

Here it is important to register that the evidence we have—explicitly in John along with various hints in the Synoptics—is of Jesus making several visits to Jerusalem.<sup>66</sup> To take this seriously is to make room for the seldom-asked question noted above. We can put that question this way: in view of Jerusalem’s fundamental role in Jewish life and hopes, would it not make good sense for Jesus to launch his mission there? That is certainly how some earlier studies have seen it: “It was fitting that the Lord’s public work should commence in Judaea and in the Holy City ... [and] not only at Jerusalem, but also at the centre of divine worship, the sanctuary of the theocracy.”<sup>67</sup> The more seriously we take Jesus’ conviction that he had a God-given mission to Israel, the more fitting such a beginning seems.

But we can go further than this. Jesus was unlikely to have had a sense of mission to Israel without also having had a clear sense of what that meant for his own status in Israel and significance for Israel. When we look at what the Gospels have to say about this, there is no evidence that this awareness dawned on him slowly. From the beginning of his ministry, he conducted himself with a sovereign authority that was certainly no less than messianic.<sup>68</sup> If anything came gradually, it

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 639 (italics his). He unfolds this theme on pp. 612–53. A similar approach is to be found in a study of Mark’s Gospel which argues that Jesus’ ministry is depicted in line with the new exodus envisaged by Isaiah, in which Yahweh leads his people back to Zion: Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus in Mark* (1997; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) 4–6, 134–36, 370–74. This means that “Jerusalem and what happens there is the climax to which the ‘journey’ moves” (p. 132). It is important to note that what this tells us is not the pattern Jesus’ ministry had to follow, but the way Mark chose to present his selective account of it. Choosing to report only the final visit to Jerusalem made it possible to exploit the parallels Mark saw with the new exodus journey to Zion.

<sup>66</sup> Freyne, *Jewish Galilee* 93, 115, 152–53. C. H. Dodd regards this as likely (*The Founder of Christianity* [London: Collins, 1971] 126, 140, 142), while Dunn gives cautious acceptance to John’s evidence for multiple visits, but does nothing with it (James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* [Christianity in the Making 1; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003] 324). See also n. 45 above.

<sup>67</sup> B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel according to St John* (London: John Murray, 1898) 40; cf. Samuel J. Andrews, *The Life of our Lord upon the Earth Considered in its Historical, Chronological, and Geographical Relations* (rev. ed.; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1892) 167–69; Marcus Dods, “The Gospel according to John,” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament* (ed. W. Robertson Nicoll; 5 vols.; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1897) 1:710; Cunningham Geikie, *The Life and Words of Christ* (London: Cassell, 1887) 317–19; Holland, *Fourth Gospel* 35; Edwyn C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (ed. Francis N. Davey; rev. ed.; London: Faber & Faber, 1947) 192–93; David Smith, *The Days of His Flesh: The Earthly Life of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1909) 58. More recently, Anderson has argued for the plausibility of such “an inaugural prophetic sign” (Riddles 210–11)—although as we are just about to see, “prophetic” does not go far enough.

<sup>68</sup> Michael F. Bird, *Are You The One Who Is To Come? The Historical Jesus and the Messianic Question* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009) 77–160; Martin Hengel, *Studies in Early Christology* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark

was not Jesus' awareness of his status and mission but the extent to which he made this apparent.<sup>69</sup> Initially, he did so in ways that were often somewhat implicit or indirect, but these tended to become less veiled as his ministry progressed. So if he launched his public ministry in Jerusalem, it would not be surprising to find that he had given some less-than-explicit demonstration of his messianic status. And that is just what his intervention in the Temple seems intended to do.<sup>70</sup>

It is widely recognized that his actions there must be seen as symbolic, and it is common to understand them as akin to the symbolic deeds of Israel's prophets.<sup>71</sup> But the OT suggests an even closer parallel. His actions are not prophetic so much as royal; they carry an implicit claim to be Israel's rightful king: "The purification of the temple ... is an action which points to the authority of a messianic king, since, as the examples of David, Solomon, Jeroboam, Hezekiah and Josiah show, in ancient Israel the king was responsible for the sanctuary."<sup>72</sup> This messianic claim is in line with what happened on his final visit to Jerusalem and the Temple: "The entry into Jerusalem and the cleansing of the temple constituted a messianic demonstration, a messianic critique, a messianic fulfilment event, and a sign of the messianic

1995) 63–72; Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the NT* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 146–55; Peter Stuhlmacher, "The Messianic Son of Man: Jesus' Claim to Deity," in *The Historical Jesus in Recent Research* (ed. James D. G. Dunn and Scot McKnight; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005) 326–31; Ben Witherington III, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 265–74; Wright, *Victory* 530–38. This does not mean, of course, that Jesus conformed to any known set of Jewish expectations. In some ways, he was less than what many were looking for, and in other ways a great deal more than they could have hoped or imagined: see, e.g., Gathercole, *The Pre-Existent Son*; Sigurd Grindheim, *God's Equal: What Can We Know About Jesus' Self-Understanding in the Synoptic Gospels?* (LNTS 446; London: Bloomsbury, 2011); Aquila H. I. Lee, *From Messiah to Preexistent Son: Jesus' Self-Consciousness and Early Christian Exegesis of Messianic Psalms* (WUNT 2/192; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2005) 166–201.

<sup>69</sup> Ben F. Meyer draws attention to the unfolding process of Jesus' 'economy of revelation, or strategy of self-disclosure' ("Jesus' Ministry and Self-Understanding," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* [ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1998] 351; see also 343, 349). See also idem, *Christus Faber: The Master-Builder and the House of God* (Princeton Theological Monographs 29; Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1992) 74–75, 257–58; Geerhardus Vos, *The Self-Disclosure of Jesus: The Modern Debate about the Messianic Consciousness* (ed. Johannes G. Vos; 2d ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 92–94.

<sup>70</sup> It is difficult to see why it is only the end of Jesus' ministry that is the "logical place" for a messianic gesture (as claimed by Cecil Roth, "The Cleansing of the Temple and Zechariah xiv 21," *NovT* 4 [1960] 176). If Jesus began a public ministry because he was convinced he had a mission to Israel, he must at some point make it clear why he was the one who had this mission. And since he must have had a clear sense of the answer to that question as he began his ministry, there is no obvious reason why he would not have given some indications of that answer from an early stage.

<sup>71</sup> So, for example, Brown, *John* 1:121; F. F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 75; A. E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (London: Duckworth, 1982) 130–31, 134; Morina D. Hooker, *The Signs of a Prophet: The Prophetic Actions of Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: TPI, 1997) 44–48; Michael Mullins, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary* (Dublin: Columba, 2003) 123–24; E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Allen Lane, 1993) 253, 260–61.

<sup>72</sup> Otto Betz, *What Do We Know About Jesus?* (London: SCM, 1968) 91. See also Bird, *Messianic Question* 127–30; Lynn H. Cohick, "Jesus as King of the Jews," in *Who Do My Opponents Say That I Am? An Investigation of the Accusations against the Historical Jesus* (ed. Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica; LNTS 327; London: T&T Clark, 2008) 120–21; Nicholas Perrin, *Jesus the Temple* (London: SPCK, 2010) 101–5; Wright, *Victory* 411, 427, 483, 491–92.

restoration of Israel.<sup>73</sup> But the way John shows Jesus making this claim is less overt and less sustained, more what might be expected early in his ministry rather than at its climax. In contrast to that final visit, he does not enter Jerusalem on this occasion making a public claim to be the king of Israel.<sup>74</sup> As he came to the Temple this first time, there would be nothing to distinguish him from any of the other pilgrims. His dramatic intervention obviously carried a claim to authority, as the call for an authenticating sign (John 2:18) recognized. But at the time, his conduct would only be seen as regal by those who had other reasons for regarding him in messianic terms.<sup>75</sup> What we see here looks more like the beginning of Jesus' "economy of revelation, or strategy of self-disclosure" (to use Meyer's terms) than its final stage. The less severe response of the "Jews" to what he does (John 2:18; cf. Mark 11:18) also suggests that we are at an early point in his public ministry.

There is more in John's account that fits the early stages of Jesus' ministry. We have already observed that the way he refers to his death and resurrection (John 2:19) fits an early date better than his final visit to Jerusalem. We have also noted the likelihood that the event John reports had a significantly different meaning from the outwardly similar event at the end of Jesus' ministry. That event foreshadowed judgment and the downfall of the Temple—but what about this one? The activities Jesus dramatically interrupted were for the benefit of the pilgrims to the Passover festival. Without the provision of animals that met the rigorous standards laid down in the Torah, most would have been unable to offer any sacrifices. And without the money-changing facilities, they would be unable to pay the Temple tax which funded the operations of the Temple and especially the twice-daily

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<sup>73</sup> Meyer, *Aims* 199; see also Adna, *Stellung* 381–83.

<sup>74</sup> On the historicity and messianic significance of Jesus' final entry to Jerusalem see Brent Kinman, "Jesus' Royal Entry into Jerusalem," in *Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus: A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence* (ed. Darrell L. Bock and Robert L. Webb; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009) 383–427.

<sup>75</sup> As the disciples did. They discerned a parallel between Jesus and David (John 2:17, quoting Ps 69:9) because they were already expecting to find such parallels, convinced that he was the messianic ruler promised in Scripture (John 1:41, 45, 49; 2:11); see Andreas J. Köstenberger, "John" in *Commentary on the NT Use of the OT* (ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007) 431–34. Although most take John 2:17 as a reference to what the disciples realized subsequently, its difference from 2:22 implies that it is referring to what they grasped at the time; see Barrett, *John* 198; J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St John* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1928) 1:92, 97; Coloe, *God Dwells* 74; Frederic Louis Godet, *Commentary on John's Gospel* (1886; repr., Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1978) 364; Hoskyns and Davey, *Fourth Gospel* 194; Köstenberger, *John* 107 n. 24; Xavier Léon-Dufour, *Lecture de l'Évangile selon Jean, I: chapitres 1–4* (Parole de Dieu; Paris: du Seuil, 1988) 257–58; Moloney, *John* 77–78; Ridderbos, *John* 116; Schnackenburg, *John* 1:347; Westcott, *John* 41.

*tamid* sacrifices.<sup>76</sup> Jesus' intervention thus amounts to much more than a "cleansing." His actions are a symbolic abolition of the Temple cult.<sup>77</sup>

To signal the end of the cult was to raise a pressing question: how would sin be atoned for and cleansing provided? What would become of Israel if there were no *tamid* sacrifices, no Day of Atonement? These questions were also raised by what Jesus went on to do in his ministry, as he displayed a "radical religious independence" by forgiving sin and welcoming "sinners."<sup>78</sup> If forgiveness and restoration were available to such people, Jesus' contemporaries would expect it to be found only "through the officially established and authorized channels of Temple and priesthood."<sup>79</sup> However, in this behavior Jesus simply bypassed the Temple cult, just as his forerunner John had done (Mark 1:4–5). Not only so, but he also pointed to himself as greater than both the Temple and its builder (Matt 12:6, 42). Such words and deeds sent a strong message: all that people had sought in the Temple they are now to find in Jesus himself.<sup>80</sup> That is the message he is giving here as he speaks of himself as the true, eschatological Temple (John 2:19, 21).<sup>81</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Neh 10:32–33; *m. Sheq.* 4.1–3. See Jostein Ådna, "Jesus' Symbolic Act in the Temple (Mark 11:15–17): The Replacement of the Sacrificial Cult by His Atoning Death," in *Gemeinde Ohne Temple/Community Without Temple: Zur Substituierung und Transformation des Jerusalemer Tempels und seines Kults im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum* (ed. Beate Ego, Armin Lange, and Peter Pilhofer; WUNT 118; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999) 467–69; idem, *Stellung* 253; Jacob Neusner, "Money-Changeers in the Temple: The Mishnah's Explanation," *NTS* 35 (1989) 288–89; E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief, 63 BCE–66 CE* (London: SCM, 1992) 104–5, 156; Schürer, *History* 2:270–72.

<sup>77</sup> Ådna, "Jesus' Symbolic Act" 466–69; idem, *Stellung* 385, 412; idem, "Temple" 2670–72; Bernard, *John* 1:87–88; Chanikuzhy, *Eschatological Temple* 257, 265–66, 327–28, 404–5; Coloe, *God Dwells* 72–74; Dietzfelbinger, *Johannes* 1:76; Dodd, *Interpretation* 301; Tom Holmén, *Jesus and Jewish Covenant Thinking* (Biblical Interpretation Series 55; Leiden: Brill, 2001) 319, 321, 326; Hoskins and Davey, *Fourth Gospel* 194; Craig R. Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995) 83–84; Léon-Dufour, *Lecture* 255; Lincoln, *John* 137–38; Marsh, *John* 165; Mullins, *John* 122, 126; Neyrey, *John* 70; W. O. E. Oesterley, "Temple," in *A Dictionary of Christ and the Gospels* (ed. James Hastings; 2 vols.; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1909) 2:712–13; Schnackenburg, *John* 1:356; Hermann Strathmann, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (11th ed.; Neue Testament Deutsch 4; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968) 61–63; Peter Stuhlmacher, "Isaiah 53 in the Gospels and Acts," in *The Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 in Jewish and Christian Sources* (ed. Bernd Janowski and Peter Stuhlmacher; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004) 151–52; Tasker, *John* 62–63; Wright, *Victory* 423.

<sup>78</sup> Matt 9:10–13; 11:19; Mark 2:5, 15–17; Luke 7:34, 48; 15:1–2; 19:5–7. The quotation is from Meyer, *Christus Faber* 257.

<sup>79</sup> Wright, *Victory* 435; cf. Dunn, *Jesus Remembered* 786–88.

<sup>80</sup> Wright, *Victory* 436 ("all that the Temple had stood for was now available through Jesus and his movement?"); cf. Bird, *Origins* 159; Meyer, *Christus Faber* 261; Perrin, *Temple* 101–13.

<sup>81</sup> On this Johannine theme see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (NSBT 17; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004) 192–200; Ulrich Busse, "Die Tempelmetaphorik als ein Beispiel von implizitem Rekurs auf die biblische Tradition im Johannesevangelium," in *The Scriptures in the Gospels* (ed. C. M. Tuckett; BETL 131; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997) 395–428; Coloe, *God Dwells*; Dennis, *Jesus' Death* 136–87; Kåre Sigvald Fuglseth, *Johannine Sectarianism in Perspective: A Sociological, Historical, and Comparative Analysis of Temple and Social Relationships in the Gospel of John, Philo, and Qumran* (NovTSup 119; Leiden: Brill, 2005) 117–85, 251–84; Lloyd Gaston, *No Stone on Another: Studies in the Significance of the Fall of Jerusalem in the Synoptic Gospels* (NovTSup 23; Leiden: Brill, 1970) 205–13; Anthony Tyrrell Hanson, *NT Interpretation of Scripture* (London: SPCK, 1980) 110–21; Hoskins, *Fulfillment*; Kerr, *Temple*; Mark Kinzer, "Temple Christology in the Gospel of John," *SBLSP* 37 (1998) 447–64; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John's Gospel and Letters: The Word, the Christ, the Son*

But the enigmatic way in which he does so fits the beginning of his ministry better than its climax.

The question still remains, although in a somewhat different form: if Jesus is to replace the Temple, where will atonement for the sins of Israel come from? The answer becomes clear later in his ministry, in the way that he speaks about his death (Mark 10:45; 14:24; and parallels). His message to the disciples is that "he himself was ready to take the place of the sacrifices ... and redeem the people of God from its guilt before God once for all with his life."<sup>82</sup> Although this message becomes explicit only later, it is already implied in what John reports. When Jesus' actions bring a symbolic ending to the Temple cult, his words point forward to his death and resurrection (John 2:19). This juxtaposition of his words and deeds gives a hint that he is already aware of how he will bring about the salvation that Israel needs. So his intervention is not, as some have claimed, a rejection of the sacrificial system as unworthy.<sup>83</sup> Instead, it implies that sacrifice will cease because it reaches its fulfillment in his death. He is not attacking the Temple cult but signalling its completion with the arrival of the new age that, as Israel's Messiah, he has come to announce and establish.<sup>84</sup>

Although most discussions of this subject tend to assume that Jesus reached these conclusions about his death only late in his ministry, there are good reasons for reaching a different view. How he understood his vocation must have become an issue as early as his baptism, at which he was identified as God's Son and Servant (Mark 1:11 and parallels, referring to Ps 2:7; Isa 42:1). For him to begin a public ministry meant that he had faced the question as to what this role would mean for him. One obvious place to find an answer was in Isaiah's discussion of the Servant's calling and ministry.<sup>85</sup> When it later emerged that he "applied Isaiah 43 and 53

*of God* (Biblical Theology of the NT; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009) 422–35; James McCaffrey, *The House with Many Rooms: The Temple Theme of Jn. 14,2–3* (AnBib 114; Rome: Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1988); Bill Salier, "The Temple in the Gospel according to John," in *Heaven on Earth: The Temple in Biblical Theology* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Simon Gathercole; Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2004) 121–34; Benney Thettayil, *In Spirit and Truth: An Exegetical Study of John 4:19–26 and a Theological Investigation of the Replacement Theme in the Fourth Gospel* (CBET 46; Leuven: Peeters, 2007) 348–427; Stephen T. Um, *The Theme of Temple Christology in John's Gospel* (LNTS 312; London: T&T Clark, 2006) 151–88; Walker, *Holy City* 161–200. On Jewish expectations of an eschatological Temple, see Bryan, *Israel's Traditions* 189–206; Chanikuzhy, *Eschatological Temple* 8–43; Dennis, *Jesus' Death* 144–64; Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* 77–90.

<sup>82</sup> Stuhlmacher, "Isaiah 53" 152; cf. Adna, "Jesus' Symbolic Act" 471–72; idem, *Stellung* 424–30; Wright, *Victory* 604, 605.

<sup>83</sup> See, e.g., Bernard, *John* 1:87 ("The killing of beasts ... was a disgusting and useless practice"); Kenneth Grayston, *The Gospel of John* (Epworth Commentaries; London: Epworth, 1990) 33 ("buying God's protection with sacrifices"); Haenchen, *John* 1:184 ("the delusion that man can buy God's favour with sacrifices"); Hoskyns and Davey, *Fourth Gospel* 194 ("a profanation of the worship of God").

<sup>84</sup> This reading of Jesus' intentions has been rejected on the grounds that it "would have made him virtually unique among his contemporaries" (Fredriksen, "Historical Jesus" 255). But that is surely the point of John's account of this event—and also of the rest of Jesus' ministry! It is only because their writers were convinced of his uniqueness that we ended up with the four Gospels. As the case of John the Baptist shows, it takes more than an "eschatological prophet" ("Historical Jesus" 275) to generate Gospels.

<sup>85</sup> For evidence that Jesus "understood his call and ministry in terms of the message of (Second) Isaiah" see Craig A. Evans, "From Gospel to Gospel: The Function of Isaiah in the NT," in *Writing and*

to himself and his sacrifice,<sup>86</sup> we are thus most likely seeing the fruits of the pondering that began no later than his baptism.<sup>87</sup> This suggests that we should see Jesus' convictions about his death in the same way we view his sense of his messianic status: it was not that he only gradually became aware of his approaching end and its meaning, but that he made his disciples and others aware of it little by little. This fits what we read in John. Jesus shows that he is aware of his coming "hour" (John 2:4). He is soon to tell Nicodemus that he must be "lifted up" like the serpent in the wilderness so that believers will have life (John 3:14–15). This is in line with the testimony that declared him to be the lamb of God (John 1:29, 36). And here we have this cryptic allusion to his death and resurrection (John 2:19), in a context which suggests that these events have eschatological and saving significance. All of this makes best sense if we are at the early stages of Jesus' ministry.

We have been arguing that for all of its outward similarity with the Temple event in the Synoptics, the one reported by John has a somewhat different significance. In a symbolic way both shut down the operations of the Temple cult in a display of messianic authority. The climactic intervention in the Synoptics does so to signal the downfall of the Temple in the judgment that is soon to fall upon Israel. But in John's account, Jesus is putting himself at the center of Israel's life, as the Messiah and the Father's Son. His words and deeds indicate that his death and resurrection will mean the end of the Temple and its sacrifices and will mark him out as the eschatological Temple. All of this is said and done in an indirect and veiled way that fits an early stage in his ministry. Such an inaugural visit to Jerusalem and the Temple makes a good fit with what we know of Jesus' messianic vocation and mission to Israel.

Arriving at these conclusions has involved adopting an approach to Jesus and his ministry somewhat different from the customary view. While this requires an

*Reading the Scroll of Isaiah: Studies of an Interpretive Tradition* (ed. Craig C. Broyles and Craig A. Evans; 2 vols.; VTSup 70; Leiden: Brill, 1997) 2:671. See also Otto Betz, "Jesus' Gospel of the Kingdom," in *The Gospel and the Gospels* (ed. Peter Stuhlmacher; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 53–74; Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans, "Jesus and Israel's Scriptures," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; Leiden: Brill, 1998) 281–335 (Jesus displayed "a marked preference for the book of Isaiah" [281]); Ben F. Meyer, "Appointed Deed, Appointed Doer: Jesus and the Scriptures," in *Authenticating the Activities of Jesus* (ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig A. Evans; Boston: Brill, 1999) 155–76 (in Isaiah he found "both his career as proclaimer of salvation and the essential burden of his proclamation" [171]).

<sup>86</sup> Stuhlmacher, "Isaiah 53" 161 (referring to Mark 9:31; 10:45; see pp. 150–51); see also Seyoon Kim, "The 'Son of Man'" as the Son of God (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985) 52–61 (on Mark 10:45); Peter Stuhlmacher, "Jesus' Readiness to Suffer and His Understanding of His Death," in *The Historical Jesus in Recent Research* 395–98. On the influence on Jesus of Isaiah 53 in particular, see Otto Betz, "Jesus and Isaiah 53," in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* (ed. William H. Bellinger Jr. and William R. Farmer; Harrisburg, PA: TPI, 1998) 70–87; R. T. France, *Jesus and the OT: His Application of OT Passages to Himself and His Mission* (London: Tyndale, 1971) 110–32; Joachim Jeremias, *NT Theology, Part One: The Proclamation of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1971) 286–99; Kim, *Son of Man* 52–73; Stuhlmacher, "Isaiah 53" 149–53; Rikki E. Watts, "Jesus' Death, Isaiah 53, and Mark 10:45: A Cruc Revisited," in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant* 125–51; idem, *New Exodus* 258–87, 349–65; Wright, *Victory* 601–4.

<sup>87</sup> Adna, *Stellung* 416; France, *OT* 124, 130; Jeremias, *Proclamation* 53–55 (though his exclusion of Ps 2:7 is unwarranted; see Lee, *Messiah* 166–78); Kim, *Son of Man* 63.

appropriate degree of caution, therefore, it is important to recognize that we got there by attempting to ask the right questions and doing our best to see where the relevant evidence leads us. If there is a more convincing view, it will have to do justice to those questions and that evidence.

## V. ARGUMENTS AGAINST AN EARLY TEMPLE EVENT

The fifth and final part of the case we are making is that the arguments against an early Temple event are not persuasive. There are three to be considered. The first claims that Jesus would not have been able to intervene like this when he was largely unknown and without popular support, since those who were affected by his actions would have resisted him strongly.<sup>88</sup> This misreads the situation John is reporting. Jesus' actions were sudden and unexpected, and they would have had people scrambling to round up their animals and retrieve their money. Those affected by what he did would have been too surprised and then too distracted to turn on him. He would only have faced resistance if he attempted to shut down their activities rather than just disrupting them. But this was no takeover bid, no occupation of the Temple: "it was a prophetic or symbolic act, limited in area, intent, and duration."<sup>89</sup>

Second, there is the claim that Jesus could hardly have got away with an initial demonstration of this kind, because the Temple authorities would have taken strong measures to put a stop to his activities: "if the event took place early in the ministry it would have proved an obstacle to Jesus' continuing his ministry especially in Jerusalem and above all in the Temple area."<sup>90</sup> Their failure to take such action can only be explained by the huge popular support shown for Jesus at his entry into Jerusalem: that is, this event happened at the end of his ministry.<sup>91</sup>

There are two problems with this view. It probably overestimates the power of the authorities. As their complex maneuvering in the Synoptic accounts of the final week shows, they could not impose their will whenever and however they chose. Moreover, in contrast to those final events, Jesus' intervention here would

<sup>88</sup> Bernard, *John* 1.88.

<sup>89</sup> Marcus J. Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teaching of Jesus* (rev. ed.; Harrisburg, PA: TPI, 1998) 182; cf. Wedderburn, "Jesus' Action" 8; Wright, *Victory* 424 ("a swift and striking symbol"). Some discussions of this incident think that Jesus emptied the whole of the outer court (e.g. Ernst Lohmeyer, *Lord of the Temple: A Study of the Relation between Cult and Gospel* [Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1961] 36), but it is difficult to see how he would have accomplished this, and a disturbance on such a massive scale would surely have invited the intervention of the Temple guards and the Roman troops. The opposite extreme, according to which Jesus' gesture "would simply have been swallowed up" (Fredriksen, "Historical Jesus" 266), does not give enough weight to the fact that he drove all of the animals away and overturned the tables of the money-changers (John 2:15). The disruption involved would have been significant enough to be noticed by more than a few but not wide enough or protracted enough to cause those on guard to step in. Borg's interpretation seems to strike the right balance.

<sup>90</sup> Mullins, *John* 122; cf. Keener, *John* 1:518–19; Tan, *Zion Traditions* 161; Witherington, *John's Wisdom* 86.

<sup>91</sup> G. H. C. MacGregor, *The Gospel of John* (MNTC; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1928) 64; Thettayil, *In Spirit and Truth* 384–85; Alfred Wikenhauser, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (RNT; Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1961) 83.

have taken them by surprise. As a result, they would not have been ready to take strong action against him even if they thought this was warranted. Second, this view overlooks the fact that what happened was not a major upheaval, like a riot. It would have been over quite quickly, and would have left no significant damage. The “Jews” might well react negatively to the implicit claim to authority over their domain (John 2:18). The strange response they received (John 2:19) gave no indication that they were facing someone who had to be stopped or a movement that had to be shut down.<sup>92</sup>

The third argument maintains that there is little likelihood that Jesus could have intervened in the Temple on a second occasion, because the authorities would ensure that it was not repeated.<sup>93</sup> This means that he cannot have done this early in his ministry. This is hardly a convincing argument. If there were two such events, they were separated by several years. During that interval Jesus visited Jerusalem a number of times, without engaging in any disruptive activity of this kind. And the authorities could not be expected to be on their guard against him indefinitely.<sup>94</sup> In addition, it would have been extremely difficult to keep him under surveillance during the festivals. The crowds of pilgrims in Jerusalem were immense, as were the throngs that entered the huge area of the Temple complex.<sup>95</sup> It would have been very easy to find anonymity in the crowds (John 5:13)—and very difficult to track down a single individual or small group (John 11:57). And even if the authorities had intended to thwart any plans Jesus might have had to intervene again, the extent of popular support for him on this final visit would have made that difficult (John 12:12–13, 18–19).

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<sup>92</sup> It has been argued that Jesus’ initial intervention in the Temple was staking a claim for honor, that his response to the challenge it elicited (John 2:18–19) was so inadequate that he was shamed in the eyes of the leaders and the crowds, and that his shaming was the reason the leaders did not need to take further action against him (E. Randolph Richards, “An Honor/Shame Argument for Two Temple Clearings,” *TrinJ* n.s. 29 [2008] 19–43). This is doubtful: (1) It maintains that the crowds judged his response as inadequate (p. 34), but the only reference to the crowds indicates that they responded favorably to Jesus (John 2:23). (2) It claims that the disciples thought he had lost the contest for honor and only believed when his resurrection showed the real weight of his response (pp. 33–34, 38), but they are nowhere portrayed as disappointed in Jesus or ashamed of him, and they do not go from embarrassment to acceptance but from not comprehending to believing. (3) It maintains that the reason the Synoptics do not report this Temple event is that they did not understand it (pp. 38, 39, 41), which is hard to believe if it involved the kind of honor contest that was fundamental to the way their society worked. (4) Two other treatments of the event from this perspective see Jesus as winning the contest involved (Bruce J. Malina and Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998] 74–75; Neyrey, *John* 71–72).

<sup>93</sup> Brown, *John* 1:117 (“it is not likely that such a serious public affront to the Temple would be permitted twice”); cf. Snodgrass, “Temple Incident” 445.

<sup>94</sup> Carson, *John* 178.

<sup>95</sup> It is difficult to be sure about the numbers involved, except that they were huge. One study concludes that up to one million pilgrims attended each of the major festivals (Wolfgang Reinhardt, “The Population Size of Jerusalem and the Numerical Growth of the Jerusalem Church,” in *The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting*, vol. 4: *The Book of Acts in Its Palestinian Setting* [ed. Richard Bauckham; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995] 237–65). Another concludes that there were regularly something like 300,000 people in Jerusalem for Passover (Kerr, *Temple* 40–42). A third argues for a figure of 300,000 to 500,000 (Sanders, *Judaism* 126–28).



## VI. CONCLUSION

Our case for two Temple interventions by Jesus has involved five steps. We have argued that the Synoptic and Johannine accounts are simply too different to be versions of the same event. Then we have argued that the common explanations for John's relocation of this event are not very persuasive. Next, we have considered seven pieces of evidence that fit an early Temple event. We have then argued that an early demonstration of messianic authority in the Temple is more likely than not when we consider Jesus' sense of his mission to Israel. Finally, we have pointed out the weaknesses of the arguments that have been advanced against an early Temple event.

Some of the arguments we have presented are admittedly stronger than others, but their cumulative effect is significant. They point to a straightforward conclusion: Jesus intervened dramatically in the activities of the Temple at both the beginning and the end of his ministry. By choosing to omit any account of Jesus' pre-Galilean ministry, the Synoptics can only report the second of these, although (as we have seen) they contain hints of earlier visits to Jerusalem. And what of John's decision to report only the first of these Temple events? Is there an external reason: he is intending to complement the Synoptics and can assume that his readers will have heard their story? Or is the reason internal: he wants to focus not on the way Jesus signals judgment for Israel but on the way he devotes his final hours to his ἴδιοι, the nucleus of the new Israel (John 13:1 cf. 1:11)? Or should we look in a different direction to find an explanation? While it is hard to be sure what his omission of the second intervention means, there is good reason to believe that John has got it right when he reports an intervention in the Temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. I think our study has shown that this conclusion is not the result of special pleading, but the product of weighing evidence carefully.