

## **John 2:13-22. Jesus' Public Revelation of Himself in the Temple.**

Hamilton Moore<sup>1</sup>

### **ABSTRACT**

John's account of the cleansing of the temple is significantly longer, more detailed, and more theological in nature than that recorded in the Synoptic Gospels. John was not just concerned about relating historical detail, but selected each event to emphasize the significance of the actions or statements of Jesus. This is also true of the cleansing of the temple in the theological truths it reveals about the person and work of Jesus. After a brief summary of what is considered to be the main purpose for the writing of the Gospel of John, the early setting of the event of cleansing is discussed. The significance of Jesus' public revelation of himself is highlighted. John is pointing to the fact that, as the place where men go in order to meet God, the temple has been supplanted and replaced by Jesus himself as the word become flesh (1:14) and by his one sacrifice "for all time" (Hebrews 10:12) in whose resurrected person people may now encounter God (cf. 1:18, 14:6).

**KEY WORDS:** Purpose of John's Gospel; temple; fulfillment; worship; death of Jesus.

### **INTRODUCTION**

How can we seek to determine the target audience or first readers of the Fourth Gospel? Again, what was its main purpose? The following facts will assist us.

The book often translates Aramaic words e.g. 1:38; 9:7 and emphasizes words like light, life, logos, truth, eternal life, rather than the kingdom of God which means that it is all meaningful to Greeks. We find a great interest in people outside Palestine, 7:35, 11:52, 12:20, while the Gospel does explain clearly some Jewish customs, 2:6; 4:9. As far as Jewish interests are concerned, a great deal is to be found in the book concerning the fulfillment of Scripture and on Jesus as the Messiah, 1:41,45; 3:14; 4:26; 5:39; v39; 7:41-42. Furthermore, there is an emphasis on the fact that "the Jews" are opposed to Jesus. In fact, the reference to "the Jews" is to be found seventy times in John, compared to only five in Matthew, six in Mark, five in Luke. Therefore, John is an intensely Jewish book, since the only Gentile who speaks is Pilate. Note the challenge of 9:22, 12:42,

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Hamilton Moore, BD; MTh; PhD (QUB), is an Adjunct Professor in Emanuel University, Oradea. Email. dr.hamilton.moore@gmail.com

the possibility of being “put out of the synagogue” if one follows Christ and accepts that he is the promised Messiah.

D. A. Carson<sup>2</sup> revived the earlier theory that John was written to evangelize Jews and proselytes. Carson claims that the purpose clause of John 20:31 ought to be read “that you may believe that the Christ the Son of God is Jesus” i.e. it is a question of identity. The combination of biblical quotations and also allusions to the OT are clear evidence that it was written to a biblically-literate readership who had some competence in these matters i.e. Diaspora Jews and proselytes particularly. In addition, one should notice the emphasis on the individual coming to faith, responding properly to God’s self-disclosure in Jesus. Although, it is best to accept the proposal of some scholars, i.e. that John should not be limited narrowly to only one purpose.

Note that there are seven “I am” sayings and seven special “signs” in this Gospel. All are supportive of the point Carson has made. Here we have a biblically-literate readership.

7 sayings unique to John – the “I Am’s”:

- (a) The bread of life, 6:35
- (b) The light of the world, 8:12
- (c) The I Am, 8:58
- (d) The good shepherd, 10:11
- (e) The resurrection and the life, 11:25
- (f) The way, the truth the life, 14:6
- (g) The true vine, 15:1

Jesus throughout his ministry performed many signs, 20:30. But in John seven are especially recorded:

- (1) 2:1-11. Changing water into wine at Cana.
- (2) 4:46-54. Healing the royal official’s son at Cana.
- (3) 5:1-15 Curing the paralyzed man at the pool of Bethesda.
- (4) 6:1-15. Multiplication of the loaves in Galilee.
- (5) 6:16-21. Walking upon the sea of Galilee.
- (6) 9:1-12. Healing the blind man in Jerusalem.
- (7) 11:1-44. Raising Lazarus from the dead.

---

<sup>2</sup> D.A. Carson, “The Purpose of the Fourth Gospel: John 20v30-31 Reconsidered”, *JBL* 108,1987: 639-651.

But the cleansing of the temple also was a sign. John does mention other signs apart from the above. John 20:30–31, “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.” A sign is an event John records which reveals Jesus’ claims as the Divine Messiah and helped instil belief in his followers. In this passage Jesus does not perform a miracle as he did when he turned water into wine. These verses while they do not record a *miracle* that shows who Jesus is, highlight an *event* that makes an important revelation about the person of Jesus i.e. he himself is the fulfillment of the temple of God on earth. God was “tabernacling” (John 1:14) among them and he was the recipient of true worship. We should note that the destruction of the second temple must have exerted a universal impact on Jews in both Palestine and the Diaspora. Köstenberger<sup>3</sup> can affirm:

*The Fourth Gospel’s emphasis on Jesus as the fulfilment of the symbolism surrounding various Jewish festivals and institutions—including the temple—can very plausibly be read against the backdrop of the then-recent destruction of the second temple as one possible element occasioning its composition... John would have formulated his Christology at least in part in the context of the crisis of belief engendered by the destruction of the temple. The gospel could then be understood, at least in part, as an effort to respond to the religious vacuum which resulted from the temple’s destruction by pointing, not to a temporary, but a permanent solution: Jesus’ replacement of the temple in the religious experience of his people by himself.*

The destruction of the temple related to messianic expectations would have allowed John the opportunity to present first to Diaspora Jews and proselytes Jesus as the fulfilment of temple-related symbolisms and OT hopes which now were being realised in him. Therefore, while the removal of the temple is not explicitly mentioned in John’s gospel, Kerr<sup>4</sup> points out that John is a writer who regularly chooses not to refer directly to important events (such as Jesus’ baptism by John or the institution of the Lord’s supper) but opts instead for more indirect strategies of bringing out the theological significance of these incidents. He refers to the fact that the “nature of irony and double meaning is to make one’s points with subtlety, not baldly. John could very well be working with the unexpressed, but universally known, presupposition that the Temple had fallen,

---

<sup>3</sup> A. J. Köstenberger, “The Destruction of the Second Temple and the Composition of the Fourth Gospel,” *Trinity Journal* 26 (2005), 215.

<sup>4</sup> Alan R. Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus’ Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John* (JSNTSS 220; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 24.

in the interests of shrewdly presenting Jesus as the new Temple complex of Judaism.” Again Köstenberger<sup>5</sup> can point out:

Specifically, it appears that the Fourth Evangelist sought to commend a permanent solution in this crisis of belief with which the Jews were faced, namely faith in Jesus the Messiah as the one who embodied the fulfilment of the underlying symbolism, not only of the temple, but of the entire Jewish festival calendar (not to speak of a variety of other typological substructures of OT theology such as the serpent in the wilderness or the manna). If so, John’s solution presents a viable alternative to the path chosen by mainstream Judaism (as represented by Pharisaism), namely, that of rabbinic Judaism centered on the Mishnah and the Talmuds.

Another scholar, J. A. Draper,<sup>6</sup> finds an explicit connection between the destruction of the temple and the message of the Fourth Gospel, suggesting that “John’s Gospel may be characterised as a fundamental response to the failed millenarian movement in 68-70 CE, which left the central symbol of the Jewish people and culture in ruins.... To most, the loss of the temple must have seemed to be a permanent loss of the presence of God with his people.” John’s message is that while “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known,” John 1:18. Again, in 4:21-24, Jesus announces, “The hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem, will you worship the Father...the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth.” Draper<sup>7</sup> affirms that John’s purpose in highlighting this temple incident early in his Gospel, which we will discuss presently, “is an important clue to its central interest.” As Motyer<sup>8</sup> also maintains, “John would have been heard to address the situation faced after the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD, particularly in Judea where the loss of the Temple and its worship were felt most keenly.” John presented his Christology in part to affirm that Jesus was the Messiah who fulfilled various elements of OT expectation, including those which pointed to God coming to his people and dwelling with them in a more permanent way than had previously been the case. So, Köstenberger<sup>9</sup> asks us to trace the emerging Johannine motif of Jesus as “the fulfilment (and thus

---

<sup>5</sup> Köstenberger, “The Destruction of the Second Temple and the Composition of the Fourth Gospel,” 221.

<sup>6</sup> J. A. Draper, “Temple, Tabernacle and Mystical Experience in John,” *Neotestamentica* 31/2 (1997): 285. He actually understands this cleansing of the temple as “repositioned” at the beginning of the Gospel, rather than a first cleansing with the second to follow in the days leading up to Jesus’ crucifixion.

<sup>7</sup> Draper, “Temple, Tabernacle and Mystical Experience in John,” 263.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Motyer, *Your Father the Devil? A New Approach to John and ‘the Jews’* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), 73.

<sup>9</sup> Köstenberger, “The Destruction of the Second Temple and the Composition of the Fourth Gospel,” 228- 29.

replacement) of Jewish religious symbolism related both to religious institutions such as the tabernacle or the temple (1:14, 51; 2:14-22; 4:19-24)” and “to various religious festivals such as Tabernacles or Dedication (7:1-8:59; 10:22-39).” For him, this will include the recognition that we noted, the physical locations of worship are inadequate. Jesus now is the proper focus of worship (9:38; 20:28).

We should note that the prologue prepares the reader for John’s temple replacement theology by the reference to the Word being made flesh and “dwelling among us” (*skenoō*, 1:14), linking Jesus with God’s presence among his people in the tabernacle and later in the temple (Exodus 26-27; 1 Kings 6:13). Particularly important here is the link with the Word being made flesh and the notion of divine glory. Frequently in the OT the glory related to God’s self-manifestation in the tabernacle and Solomon’s temple. Now this divine glory, the Hebrew *shekinah*, previously limited to the Temple is visible in Jesus Christ because it is bound to the Logos become flesh. In addition, Judaism claimed Jerusalem and the Torah, were the focal points for the entire cosmos; John claims this for Jesus.

#### THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE IN JOHN’S GOSPEL

John’s account of the cleansing of the temple follows as we noted the first recorded “sign,” the changing of water into wine in Cana of Galilee. John here recounts Jesus’ Passover<sup>10</sup> visit in Jerusalem, which is the actual beginning of his revelation of himself to widening circles. The cleansing is an affirmation of Jesus’ authority, of who he really is and an indicator of the crisis his mission presented to Judaism. John alone terms the feast “the Passover of the Jews” (2:13; cf. 6:4; 11:55), rather than simply “the Passover” or “the Lord’s Passover” (Exodus 12:11), thus distancing himself from the religious observances of Judaism, which Christians have claimed were fulfilled in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 5:7-8). Dodd<sup>11</sup> sees this event is part of a block of material at the commencement of the “book of signs” (2:11; 20:30) which has a common theme of new and better beginnings in Christ (2:1-4:42), as later expounded by Paul (2 Corinthians 5:17).

John differs from the Synoptic Gospels in placing the cleansing of the temple at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry instead of near the end (Matthew 21:12-17; Mark 11:15-18; Luke 19:45-46). Scholars disagree over whether this is the first

---

<sup>10</sup> The Jewish Passover celebration commemorates the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, when the angel of judgment passed over every home where the first Passover was observed and the blood of the paschal lamb had been placed on the two door posts and the lintel, Ex. 12:12-13, 43-51.

<sup>11</sup> C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 289.

of two similar events in the ministry of Jesus, or whether the one cleansing was adjusted chronologically by either John or the synoptic writers. Many feel that John's theological emphasis caused him to place the event at the start; while others accept the Johannine dating, but believe that Mark included his account of the cleansing with his only one recorded visit of Jesus to Jerusalem. John places it during the first of three Passovers (2:13) within the limits of Jesus' ministry (cf. 6:4; 11:55). Carson<sup>12</sup> cautions: "all four Evangelists frequently arrange their material in topical rather than chronological order; one should not rush to harmonize by addition." However, while it is not possible to resolve the issue with certainty, we agree with Carson<sup>13</sup> that "the arguments for one (cleansing) are weak and subjective, while the natural reading of the text favours two." We would follow Tasker<sup>14</sup> when he maintains: "John is not correcting a supposed chronological blunder on the part of the earlier evangelists, nor deliberately altering their history in the interests of theological exposition, but...relating an additional 'cleansing' which the Synoptic writers had no occasion to relate."

Carson<sup>15</sup> rightly states that "it is hard to imagine two cleansings of the temple without some similarities. That both should occur near a Passover festival is not too surprising, since only at the high feasts would we be likely to find Jesus in Jerusalem." While both events are similar, they have noticeable differences. Morris<sup>16</sup> convincingly argues that "the Johannine narrative is firmly embedded in a great block of non-synoptic material" and that "the evil in question was one which was likely to recur after a check." The use of the severer phrase "den of robbers" in the Synoptics, (Matthew 21:13) rather than "house of merchandise", (John 2:16), may suggest greater displeasure at the second cleansing. John indicates that Jesus was in Galilee during the next Passover (6:4), allowing around two years between each cleansing. Jesus' initial cleansing, as an unknown Rabbi at the commencement of his ministry, would not have outraged the authorities as much as the latter, when he was a highly controversial figure; nor is it likely to have permanently ended the practice. As Jesus had attracted popular support (2:23) the authorities may have chosen to excuse his action as an over-zealous impulse, but a later repetition would have been treated as an act of defiance against the system.

---

<sup>12</sup> D.A Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, (Leicester, Inter-varsity Press, 1991), 177.

<sup>13</sup> Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 178.

<sup>14</sup> R.V.G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), 61.

<sup>15</sup> Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 177.

<sup>16</sup> L. Morris, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 190.

## JESUS REVEALS HIMSELF

We remember from Acts 1-2 the scene at Pentecost, where so many people would throng Jerusalem to celebrate the feast. Passover-time would be similar. Great crowds would arrive in Jerusalem, not only from other parts of Israel, but from all over the world (Acts 2:5-12). Howard-Brook<sup>17</sup> estimates that the population of Jerusalem would swell from 50,000 to 180,000 at Passover. These Jews and proselytes would have to pay the half-shekel temple tax in the coinage of the temple, as the “foreign” currency with the image of the Emperor would be unacceptable and had to be exchanged for the proper coin. These worshippers also had to offer up their sacrifices, and for many of these travelers, the only solution was to buy a sacrificial animal there in Jerusalem. It is likely that Jesus would have come up annually with his parents to fulfill the requirement of the Law that every male Jew, from the age of twelve up, attend the Passover at Jerusalem (Deuteronomy 16:16). To this Passover he came as the Messiah and God the Son or “the only God,” John 1:18. Regarding the cleansing, Milne<sup>18</sup> makes the point that it would have been appropriate for Jesus to herald the commencement and also close his ministry by such an action; initially by a Messianic demand for spiritual reformation, and in the shadow of his impending death to declare the bankruptcy of religious legalism.

The first temple, was built by Solomon (1 Kings 6-7), the second, by the Jews who returned from the Babylonian captivity (Ezra 6:15). This temple was the third temple, known as “Herod’s Temple.” He built it not so much to facilitate Israel’s worship, but as an attempt to reconcile the Jews to their Idumaeen king. Scholarly consensus holds that Herod commenced the third temple in 19 BC, and that, although the main structure was completed within ten years, work continued until 64 AD. The Jews’ comment that it had then taken forty-six years to build (2:20) implies a date of 27 AD, which would be around the start of Jesus’ ministry. Perhaps it did not have the glory of the first temple built by Solomon, but it must have exceeded the beauty and splendor of the second temple, (cf. Ezra 3:12; Mark 13:1).

## JESUS IN THE TEMPLE

In v.13-16 Jesus’ actions in the temple are recorded. We find one long and complex Greek sentence, (2:14-16), which underscores the intensity and urgency of his actions. The disciples only passively witness.

---

<sup>17</sup> W. Howard-Brook, *Becoming the Children of God: John’s Gospel and Radical Discipleship* (New York: Maryknoll, 1994), 83.

<sup>18</sup> B. Milne, *The Message of John* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 68.

Only John mentions sheep and cattle and the detail of Jesus' whip. The sellers of oxen, sheep and doves were providing the animals necessary for temple sacrifice, and the moneychangers were providing a currency exchange for Jews arriving from different countries who needed to buy animals, or pay the temple tax in the approved denomination (i.e. the half-shekel, Exodus 30:13-16). Generally, scholars suggest that no coin bearing the effigy of the emperor could be offered to the temple for any purpose. But Morris<sup>19</sup> refers to Israel Abrahams who maintained that Tyrian coins bore similar markings and suggested that it was the exceptional quality of the Tyrian coins (exact weights and high silver content) that made them acceptable. According to Brown,<sup>20</sup> the high priest, Caiaphas, permitted his supporters<sup>21</sup> to move their trading stalls to the temple as a way of avenging himself against rivals in the Sanhedrin. This would mean that there was a large number of people offended by this commerce in the temple. Also, by the unnecessary crowding and stink in the temple precincts.

Was Jesus simply objecting here to them carrying on their business inside the outer courtyard of the temple (the court of the Gentiles)? He said to the dovesellers, "take these things away; do not make my Father's house a house of trade," (2:16, cf. Zechariah 14:21). The traders and money-changes had to work somewhere convenient, but that need not be within the temple precincts. The result was that the place of prayer for all nations (cf. Isaiah 56:7; Mark 11:17) was filled with the noise, filth and stench of a cattle market, and inquiring Gentiles seeking God found only commerce there. Kostenberger<sup>22</sup> explains that the Court of the Gentiles is the only access that Gentiles have to the temple, and these vendors render Gentile worship impossible by using their space for commercial purposes. However, the "den of robbers", recorded by the Synoptic writers (cf. Matthew 21:13 and Jeremiah 7:11), implies corrupt trading and exploitation.<sup>23</sup> Mark 11:16 also implies that Jesus objected to travelers or traders making the use of the temple as a shortcut.

Morris<sup>24</sup> notes that "it was not so much the physical force as the moral power he employed that emptied the courts." He stood alone in opposition and his righteous anger stirred the consciences of the merchants. In fulfillment of

---

<sup>19</sup> Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 170.

<sup>20</sup> R. E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 119.

<sup>21</sup> The Sadducees controlled the high priesthood and the temple mount.

<sup>22</sup> A. J. Köstenberger, *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 106.

<sup>23</sup> We should not miss the parallel in Jesus' denunciation: the "house of my father" has become a "house of *emporium*," of trading (from which we get, through Latin, "emporium"). Activities which were supposed to serve the worship of God have now displaced it and the trading has taken centre stage.

<sup>24</sup> Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 194.



prophecy (Malachi 3:1-4), his first official act was to purge his temple of the false system of worship within. Filled with zealous righteousness, Jesus made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; He scattered the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their tables (2:15).

There is no record of him actually smiting the traders themselves (though it may be implied by the “all” of 2:15; cf. Synoptics, how he drove them out). The scourge of chords was more a symbol of authority than a weapon. Even though he drove out the sheep and cattle, and scattered the money by overturning the tables, he was not seeking to destroy property. He did not release the pigeons, either lest they escape, or because he was more lenient to those providing a service to poorer worshippers (cf. Leviticus 12:8; Luke 2:22-24). As Milne<sup>25</sup> notes “gentle Jesus meek and mild is nowhere more inaccurate and unhistorical than here.” But Jesus’ actions and his denunciation, would be intended to make a point and reveal who he was rather than actually purify the temple.<sup>26</sup>

#### THIS EVENT IS ABOUT FULFILLMENT

We should note that John’s Gospel seeks to show that Jesus came to fulfill the old system, not reform it. In v.17 John records “His disciples remembered that it was written, ‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’”

We are not told whether it was at this time or after the resurrection (cf. v22) that the disciples came to associate Jesus’ action with the above prophecy from Psalm 69:9. Carson<sup>27</sup> makes the point that “if his disciples remembered these words at the time, they probably focused on the zeal, not the manner of the consumption.” Psalm 69 is generally given a Messianic significance in the New Testament (cf. John 15:25, 19:28; Acts 1:20; Romans 11:9; 15:3). Jesus himself cited Psalm 69:4 in John 15:25 as his own experience, and uttered the words “I thirst” from the cross in fulfillment of 69:21. John’s quotation of Psalm 69:9 fixes the reader’s attention on Jesus, rather than the temple, and points to Jesus’ future sufferings rather than any focus upon his present location. The citation of this Psalm of lament is so significant as it prophetically articulates many of the things that Jesus felt during his trial and crucifixion – hated without a cause, enemies without number, betrayal by friends, mocked by passers-by—and yet trusting in

---

<sup>25</sup> Milne, *The Message of John*, 69.

<sup>26</sup> It is clear that the cleansing of the temple does not permanently remove the abuses. The conditions in the temple were the same at the time of the second cleansing (described in the Synoptic Gospels) as they were in the first cleansing (described here by John). It seems that after the Lord departed from Jerusalem all the temple traders began to operate again. There was no sense of guilt or repentance. The Lord’s purpose in this first cleansing is to “make a statement,” about himself, the temple, and the Jewish religious system.

<sup>27</sup> Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 180.

God for deliverance. Jesus' zeal for God and his house will indeed consume him in death on the cross in Jerusalem. The fact that it was Passover time with its association with the imagery of the sacrificed unblemished lamb and the blood of deliverance is also highly significant (John 1:29; 6:4; 19:14-16, 31-37).

The Greek verb here in 2:17 is in the future passive tense, rather than the past tense of Psalm 69:9, and implies that Jesus' zeal, evidenced in his cleansing of the temple, was associated with the necessity for him to die on the cross. His zeal for the birth of a people (3:1-10; 4:21-24) who could offer pure and acceptable worship required the necessity for his death. The Sadducees would later seek his death for what he did on that day at the temple mount. After the Sanhedrin had him arrested, Annas would question Jesus first before sending him to his son-in-law, the acting high priest, Caiaphas who would arrange for his execution by the Romans.

Jesus' action implied a special relationship with God, just as his use of "my Father's house", (cf. Luke 2:49) implied a unique sonship distinct from natural humanity. His actions here were not that of just a reforming prophet. The Messiah and Son of God has come to his temple, (Haggai 2:9; Malachi 3:1-4; John 20:30-31). The Jews ask for a sign of his authority in v18, (cf. also Mark 8:12; 1 Corinthians 1:22). They may have discerned a messianic claim (Malachi 3:1ff. mentioned above). They did not dispute the rightness of his action, but neither did they admit guilt. "What sign do *you* show us for doing these things?" The word "you" is emphatic in the Greek. Though asking the Lord for a sign they apparently mocked the suggestion that *he* (of all people) could do such a thing! They were more concerned with the issue of authority than purity of worship; yet the boldness of Jesus' action must have made them wary lest they had a divinely appointed prophet among them. Had they had any spiritual insight as well as their knowledge of the OT they would have realized that the cleansing was a sign in itself of the presence of God. Jesus is claiming to have the authority to correct the evils performed in the temple. He calls the temple "my Father's house," (v16). Sadly, no-one who actually witnessed this event fully grasped its meaning or significance.<sup>28</sup> The disciples will understand, but only after our Lord's death and resurrection, only after the coming of the Holy Spirit, (John 16:12-14). Note that Jesus not only came with God's authority, (as a prophet might do); he came as "the only God," 1:18. Morris'<sup>29</sup> comments about the Jews:

This expression ["the Jews"] is rare in the Synoptic Gospels. Each of them refers a few times to "the King of the Jews" and scarcely uses the term

---

<sup>28</sup> This is the first time that Jesus identifies God as his Father, but the Jews who question him in verse 18 do not challenge him about this.

<sup>29</sup> Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 130-131.

otherwise. But in John it is used some seventy times. Sometimes the Evangelist employs it in a neutral sense (e.g. 2:6, “the Jews’ manner of purifying”). He can even use it in a good sense (e.g. “salvation is from the Jews,” 4:22. But more often he uses it to denote the Jewish nation as hostile to Jesus. It does not necessarily denote the whole nation. In fact characteristically it means the Jews of Judea, especially those in and around Jerusalem.

We can say that in John’s Gospel this hostility to Jesus is recorded of the chief priests and Pharisees. They are depicted as our Lord’s bitterest opponents.

There is an allusion here to Zechariah 14:21. The passage from Zechariah was looking toward the Day of the Lord—a day when “every pot in Jerusalem and Judah shall be holy to the LORD of hosts so that all who sacrifice may come and take of them, and boil the meat of the sacrifice in them. And there shall no longer be a trader in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day.” At that time, holiness will pervade all of life, so that the temple sacrifices (and the animal sellers and money changers) will no longer be necessary. It is Jesus, the messiah, by his coming death who brings that reality into being. He will offer “for all time” the one sacrifice to take away sin, Hebrews 10:12. But the Jewish leaders could not see this.

Jesus replied with a counter-challenge in the form of a riddle, “Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up” (2:19). They failed to understand, as their disbelieving response shows (2:20); they thought he was referring to the Jerusalem temple. Any suggestion that Jesus was primarily referring to the spiritual resurrection of religion, and the supplanting of the old faith by the new is at odds to John’s explanation in v21. A resurrected Messiah had been foreshadowed in the Jewish Scriptures (cf. Psalm 16:10; Hosea 6:2), but considering the location their response is understandable. The Jews constantly only saw the immediate literal application in Jesus’ remarks (cf. John 6:51-52). Morris<sup>30</sup> considers it ironic that “the Jews themselves were to be the means of bringing about the sign they asked the Christ to produce.” Should we note that the resurrection of Jesus is the eighth sign to which the other seven in the narrative of John’s Gospel point?

John interprets Jesus’ statement so that his readers realize the intended significance: “he spoke of the temple of his body”, (v21). Jesus could challenge the temple system because as John in his Gospel was affirming that he was now the primary embodiment of God’s presence on earth (1:14). Even his disciples did not fully appreciate the significance of his words until after his resurrection (v22), though Jesus had spoken plainly of it, (Matthew 17:22-23). They fully

---

<sup>30</sup> Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 199.

understood and believed after they saw it fulfilled. For John this remembrance was a result of Holy Spirit aided, post-resurrection reflection on the past (14:26). John refers in v22 to the revelation of the truth of “the Scripture” (cf. Psalm 16:10; Acts 2:31; or Isaiah 53:12) and Jesus’ “word,” in ways that gave both equal authority, creating Christological implications for the person of Jesus, cf. 12:16.

Jesus’ own death and the destruction of the Jerusalem temple were thus inevitably linked together, as indicated by the rending of the veil of the temple (cf. Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45). Jesus had come to die because the temple and its sacrifices were inadequate as a means of appeasing and approaching God. Here Jesus uses the Greek word *naos* which refers to the inner shrine of the temple, the dwelling place of deity; not *hieron* which, as used in 2:14-15, includes the temple precincts. Here was a pointer to his deity; an implication that God uniquely dwelled in him (cf. Colossians 2:9). Hence his implication of unity with the Father by his own part in the resurrection (2:19), and later of mutual indwelling (cf. 14:10-11). John ascribes the resurrection power to Jesus himself (cf. 10:17-18) while other New Testament writers speak of the Father raising the Son (Romans 4:24; 8:11; Acts 3:15; 4:10). What was destroyed was also going to be raised.

*This* temple was to be a sacrifice to end all need for sacrifices. Jesus not only cleansed the temple; he later fulfilled it, rendering it obsolete. Later, in weeping over Jerusalem, he would declare “your house is left unto you desolate”, (Matthew 23:38). How much all this would mean to his first readers, Jews and proselytes of the Diaspora, who had seen the temple in Jerusalem destroyed. He was the living, fulfillment of the temple of God on earth, and the recipient of true worship. They had lost nothing.

“DESTROY THIS TEMPLE...”

Although false witnesses misrepresented Jesus’ statement at his trial (Matthew 26:59-61), distorting his challenge into a threat (Mark 14:58; cf. Acts 6:14) with conflicting accounts (Mark 14:59) and taunting him while on the cross (Matthew 27:40; Mark 15:29), the true implication of his actual words here was evidently later understood by the Jewish leaders (Matthew 27:63). Morris<sup>31</sup> concedes that “it is not easy to understand” and that “it would readily be misunderstood and misremembered,” the persistent repetition of the charge shows that Jesus said something of this nature. Only John records the true saying in its original context, thus complementing the synoptic evidence. It was a challenge to the Jews to destroy him; he did not say he would destroy anything.

---

<sup>31</sup> Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 199.

This (2:19) is “the word” which the disciples remembered (2:22) and understood (2:19) after Jesus’ death, as evidenced by Peter’s application at Pentecost, (cf. Psalm 16:8-11 and Acts 2:24-28). As mentioned earlier, explanations of misunderstandings (especially by unbelievers) are common in John. His honest admission of earlier ignorance (2:22) supports the historical integrity of the book.

Morris<sup>32</sup> clarifies the issue by saying that “while the primary reference of the saying is surely to the resurrection of Jesus it would be quite in the Johannine manner to see a double meaning in the words. It may well be that they point us also to the ultimate abolition of the temple and of the temple sacrifices.” Milne<sup>33</sup> suggests that the statement has a parallel in “the sign of Jonah” of which Jesus spoke in Matthew 12:38-40 when predicting his destruction at the hands of the Jewish authorities and his glorious resurrection, as the sign that will authenticate his claims and this specific action. He was saying that the sign of his authority would be his death and resurrection.

Jesus looked beyond temple worship to after his death and resurrection when worship would be “in spirit and in truth” (4:21-24) and not be tied by geographical location. The Jerusalem temple would become spiritually redundant, and thus he predicted the end of the Jewish religious system. It had been a temporary token residence of the presence of God, one who was too great to be thus confined (Acts 7:48-50; 17:24). Jesus had come to create a more direct avenue whereby men could approach God in worship. This was to be by the offering of his own body as an atoning sacrifice, the Father's acceptance of which would be signaled by his resurrection on the third day. He therefore invited belief in him (20:30-31) and heartfelt worship (4:23-24) and denounced impure outward observance. By his cleansing of the temple Jesus manifested his truth, having previously manifested his glory and grace at Cana (cf. 1:14, 17; 2:11). Therefore, John is pointing to the fact that, as the place where men go in order to meet God, the temple has been supplanted and replaced by Jesus himself, in whose resurrected person people will now encounter God (cf. 1:18, 14:6).

## CONCLUSION

As with all John’s selections, the “cleansing of the temple” is highly significant as it proclaimed Jesus' Messiahship, his deity, his fulfillment of OT promises and hopes and his purifying saving mission. His statement foretold his death and resurrection as the ultimate sign of his authority and power. It was a symbolic gesture intended as an eschatological sign to those with spiritual insight. God

---

<sup>32</sup> Morris, *The Gospel according to John*, 203.

<sup>33</sup> Milne, *The Message of John*, 69.

had become flesh and dwelled among them (1:14) as Christ, the anointed one, (1:41) through whom the Kingdom of God was to be realized. For John's readers the record helps make as dramatic an introduction to Jesus as the actual event did to the Jewish nation at the first Passover of his ministry. The shadow of his death, in Jerusalem, at the hands of his Jewish opponents, and what it accomplished, and signified, hangs over the Fourth Gospel from the beginning. Some have spoken of a more "realized" crucifixion, which goes with his "realized" eschatology. It can be accepted that both the death of Jesus and the eternal life that comes from it are realities from the very beginning of John's narrative.

John's gospel remains distinct from the Synoptics by the frequent use of dialogues for didactic purposes. Carson<sup>34</sup> explains that in each dialogue Jesus discloses himself as the fulfillment of OT promises and institutions. His readers should believe, John 19:30-31. As Köstenberger<sup>35</sup> observes:

The significance of this sign, which escaped both the Jews and the twelve at the time it took place, ought not to remain a mystery to the first readers of John's gospel. Rather, they should be able to understand that the temple clearing was a messianic sign that pointed to the inner meaning of Jesus' crucifixion and bodily resurrection and presented Jesus as both the fulfillment and the replacement of temple symbolism and the new and true center of worship for his new messianic community.

Jesus himself, in his own body, was a new "Temple," who embodied in himself the meaning of the Temple and its significance. John calls upon his readers to realize that there was indeed life after the destruction of the temple and life apart from Jerusalem. The old order had given way to the new. As Walker<sup>36</sup> stresses, "From the moment Jesus first appeared in the city the role of Jerusalem and its Temple were destined to undergo a dramatic change. These entities would no longer be necessary for any sense of proximity to God...God was now found in Jesus, and Jesus through the Spirit."

---

<sup>34</sup> Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 214.

<sup>35</sup> Köstenberger, "The Destruction of the Second Temple and the Composition of the Fourth Gospel," 235.

<sup>36</sup> Peter W. L. Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City: New Testament Perspectives on Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 199-200.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barclay, W., *The Gospel of John*, 2 vols. Edinburgh: St. Andrews Press, 1975.
- Barrett, C.K., *The Gospel according to John; An Introduction with Commentary and notes on the Greek Text*. London: SPCK, 1978.
- Beasley-Murray, G.R., Sec. ed. *John*, Nashville: Word Books, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999.
- Brown, R.E., *The Gospel according to John; Introduction, Translation and Notes*, 2 vols. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1966-71.
- Bultmann, R., *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1971.
- Carson, D.A., *The Gospel According to John*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991.
- Culpepper, A., *The Gospel and Letters of John*. Nashville: Abingdon, 1998.
- Draper, J. A., "Temple, Tabernacle and Mystical Experience in John," *Neotestamentica* 31/2 (1997).
- Howard-Brook, W. *Becoming the Children of God: John's Gospel and Radical Discipleship*. New York: Maryknoll, 1994.
- Kerr, Alan, R., *The Temple of Jesus' Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John*, JSNTSS 220. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002.
- Köstenberger, Andreas J., *Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: John*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004.
- "The Destruction of the Second Temple and the Composition of the Fourth Gospel," *Trinity Journal* 26 (2005) 205-242.
- Kruse C.C., *The Letters of John*. Leicester: Apollos, 2000.
- Keener, C. S., *The Gospel of John*, 2 vols. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003.
- Milne, B., (1993), *The Message of John*. Leicester: Inter-varsity Press, 1993.
- Morris, L., *The Gospel according to John*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995, Rev. Ed.
- Motyer, Stephen, *Your Father the Devil? A New Approach to John and "the Jews."* Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997.
- Schnackenburg, R., *The Gospel according to John*, 3 vols. London: Burns and Oates, 1968-82.
- Smalley, S. S., *John: Evangelist and Interpreter*. Guernsey: Paternoster Press Co. Ltd., 1978.
- Walker, Peter, W.L., *Jesus and the Holy City: New Testament Perspectives on Jerusalem*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).