

Cleansing or Destruction? Jesus' Temple Action in Mark 11

Jon Rogers

MA

04/02/11

Conrad Gempf

Exegesis of Mark's Gospel

Contents

1	Introduction: Why the Temple Action matters.....	1
2	Two Scriptures.....	1
3	Cleansing: Trading and Taxes in the Temple.....	2
4	Who are the Robbers?.....	3
5	Cleansing: Idols and sacrifices.....	4
6	A big deal?.....	5
7	Destruction.....	6
8	A Withered Fig Tree.....	7
9	Interpreting the Tree and the Temple together.....	8
10	Conclusion.....	9

1 Introduction: Why the Temple Action matters

In Mark 11, Jesus is depicted violently disrupting trade in the outer court of the temple in Jerusalem. Traditionally this has been described as ‘cleansing the temple’¹ but in recent years, analyses of the ‘temple action’ have described it as a symbol of destruction.² These two interpretations seem to be entirely opposite to each other – did Jesus want to reform and perfect the temple worship or halt it so the temple would be utterly destroyed?

This episode is not unique to Mark’s Gospel – it is paralleled in each of the other evangelists (Matt 21:12-13; Luke 19:45-48; John 2:14-17). Mark gives us the longest account while Luke’s account is the shortest, not discussing the details of what was being sold by those driven out by Jesus. Matthew has money-changers and doves being sold, but only Mark describes people buying and carrying things through the temple. Both Luke and Matthew do not say that the temple as a ‘house of prayer’ should be for ‘all the nations’, but all the synoptic gospels talk about the opposition of the ‘chief priests and scribes’.

John’s telling differs significantly from the synoptics, not merely in his way of telling it, but in its location within the gospel as a whole. Although John agrees with Mark in placing the action during a passover visit to Jerusalem,³ John places the temple action very early in his gospel, just after the disciples are called and the first miracle (‘sign’) at Cana. In John, the violence of Jesus’ action is amplified for us, with a ‘whip of cords’ used to drive out all the money-changers and sellers not just of doves, but sheep and oxen too.

Therefore we find that all of the evangelists think this episode is so important that it must be included in their telling of Jesus’ life and all link it with a threat of death toward Jesus. This shows that it is a critical event to understanding Jesus and what he sought to do.

If Jesus’ action in the temple is controversial and difficult to understand, the story that surrounds in Mark it is bewildering. Jesus curses a fig tree that has no fruit but many leaves, even though it is not the time of year for ripe figs. This paper will explore how the events are linked and how each aids our understanding of the other. We will examine different interpretations of the passage, seeking to understand why Jesus may wish to cleanse or destroy the temple in his action, focussing on Mark 11, where Jesus “clears”⁴ or “cleanses”⁵ the temple courts and gives a brief reason for his unusual action.

2 Two Scriptures

Mark tells us that Jesus drove out the traders and money changers, then taught about what he had done and why it needed to be done, employing two scriptures to make his point (Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11). The two passages have been selected because they each use the word ‘house’ - a technique called ‘Gezera sawa (lit. “an equivalent regulation”)’.⁶ This technique was used extensively by later Rabbis to develop longer teachings from separate passages with very different original contexts and several examples in Jesus’ teaching have been highlighted.⁷

Isaiah 56 is a passage full of hope that foreigners who have turned to God will not be excluded from worship, but will be ‘gathered in’. In contrast, ‘Jeremiah 7 qualifies the positive eschatological expectation expressed in Isaiah

1 Gundry, *Mark*, 641.

2 e.g. Wright, *Victory*, 417.

3 Edwards, *Mark*, 262.

4 NIV titles on Mark 11:12.

5 ESV titles on Mark 11:15.

6 Chilton, ‘Scriptures’, 288.

7 Chilton, ‘Scriptures’, 288-290.

56.’⁸ In this chapter, Jeremiah speaks a word that attacks the people of Jerusalem and specifically the priests. They are exploiting the poor, murdering, committing adultery and then coming back to the temple as if they had done nothing wrong, expecting that God was happy to bless them. Worse, they use the temple as a place to meet and discuss what they are doing. Jeremiah tells them that the same fate will befall them and their sanctuary as the priests and tabernacle at Shiloh, where corruption and idolatry preceded destruction.

The quotations can help us as we assess the raft of theories that have been brought forward to explain the temple action, seeking to understand the symbolic meaning of driving out traders and money-changers. The theories fall into two main categories – those who are happy with the traditional title of ‘cleansing’ and those who would rather speak of ‘destruction’.

3 Cleansing: Trading and Taxes in the Temple

Mark tells us that Jesus ‘entered the temple and began to drive out those who sold and those who bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons.’ (Mark 11:15, ESV.) Bauckham points out that changing money was not a ‘private enterprise ... but a facility organised by the temple treasury’.⁹ It seems that the tables were not a permanent fixture in the temple; the money was being changed so that the temple tax could be paid. Once a year, in a period of a couple of weeks before Passover, the temple tax was collected,¹⁰ half shekel for every male, and it had to be paid in the Tyrian currency.¹¹ This had been selected as it was the nearest coin to the Israelite shekel and did not have an idolatrous bust of a man on it.¹² Its purpose was originally to pay for the upkeep of the temple, providing for the morning and evening sacrifices and the sustenance of the Priests and Levites at the temple, but later to also support Herod’s building project of expanding the temple.¹³

Mark emphasises that the buying and selling was inside the temple, not merely nearby. Animals were required for worship of God, to be sacrificed in the temple. The huge volume of animals required is illustrated by Josephus who says that in the year the temple was completed, AD 66, 255,600 lambs were sacrificed for Passover.¹⁴ The animals to be sacrificed were required to be ‘without defect or blemish’ (Lev 22:21, Num 19:2) and after a long journey to Jerusalem for sacrifice, it would be difficult to guarantee that an animal would not get injured or ‘blemished’ in some way.¹⁵ So those living far away would sell the animal they had put aside for sacrifice and use the money to buy a spotless animal once they arrived in Jerusalem, cutting out the step of having their own animal validated as kosher for sacrifice. For many years

8 Chilton, ‘Scriptures’, 289.

9 Bauckham, ‘Demonstration’, 75.

10 France, *Mark*, 443-444.

11 Hooker, *Mark*, 268.

12 Richardson, *Jewish*, 247.

13 Chilton, *Sacrifice*, 110.

14 Josephus, *War*, 6.422-27 cited in Hooker, *Mark*, 341.

15 Sanders, *Temple*, 64-65.

this had happened outside the temple complex at a place called *Hanuth* (which simply means ‘market’ in Aramaic).¹⁶

However, in the previous few years, the high priest had moved this trade to within the outer court of the Temple. Chilton cites Victor Eppstein, ‘Caiaphas ... introduced traders into the Temple, "an exceptional and shocking license in the Spring of 30 C.E. by the vindictive Caiaphas.”’¹⁷ Eppstein’s modern reaction to this change must have mirrored the strict Pharisees of the time, since the whole Temple complex was treated as holy.

The idea that Jesus was attacking the sale of animals within the temple becomes incredible in the context of the quotation he employs to explain and teach about his action. What Jesus says does not mention desecration of the temple through noise or excrement. If Jesus’ intent was to cleanse the temple of the profanity of selling animals, he would not have spoken of robbers, but employed different scriptures.

Perhaps Jesus saw the noise and smell of animals waiting in the temple courts for sale and sacrifice to have been unsuitable for a ‘house of prayer’. Reading the words that Mark alone records, that the temple should be for ‘all the nations’, we might think that Jesus wants to put the trading outside of the temple complex so that Gentiles may worship God in the only part of the temple that they have access too. But Borg dispels this notion quickly. ‘The designation "Court of the Gentiles" is modern, unknown in antiquity ... this court was neither named after them nor meant for them.’¹⁸ The ‘Court of the Gentiles’ was not thought of as a place where Gentiles would worship or pray, but a limit to where they could go and what they could do. Borg goes on suggest that the ‘robbers’ are excluding all the outsiders who would worship God. The entire temple system was based on keeping impurity out rather than welcoming in sincere worshippers. Yet Jesus’ focus seems to be almost unwaveringly on Israel first, only once they were right with God could gentiles be welcomed in to worship.

4 Who are the Robbers?

Others have focussed, with John’s account, on the trade itself, questioning whether the trade itself was unfair and a stain on the purity of the temple. The temple monopoly on the sale of doves (the only animal that the synoptic writers mention) is explored by Bauckham. Ostensibly to protect the purity of sacrifice, the rules governing the rearing and sale of birds for temple sacrifice were so strict that it seems doves that originated from outside the temple could not be certified as fit for sacrifice. This went beyond the Law of Moses, which did not make the same requirement for spotlessness for birds that it did for cattle sheep and goats.¹⁹ Bauckham also points out that doves were especially the sacrifice of the poor. The temple treasury monopoly gave the opportunity to charge what they wanted for doves, extorting the poor. Several commentators relate the story in the Mishnah of how R. Simeon deliberately relaxed a teaching on when

16 Evans, ‘Action’, 265.

17 Eppstein, ‘Historicity’ as cited by Chilton, *Temple*, 108.

18 Borg, *Conflict*, 175.

19 Bauckham, ‘Demonstration’, 76.

doves should be sacrificed in order that the price would be dropped and the poor would be able to afford to sacrifice (*m. Keritot* 1:7).²⁰

The extent to which overcharging might have occurred has been questioned by some scholars.²¹ A simplistic view of the passage might think that Jesus refers to the traders as the 'robbers'. But Jesus uses the word *lestes*, which does not mean 'swindler' - there is the word *kleptes*²² for that. Jesus uses the Septuagint translation of Jeremiah's Hebrew *parisim* - like *lestes*, it gives the sense of a person who commits violent theft.²³ We might choose a word like 'mugger' today. The traders were not mugging worshippers, Jesus is speaking of other 'robbers'.

Josephus uses *lestes* to refer to the brigands or armed insurgents of the Revolutionary War, but Wright takes this idea too far.²⁴ It is beyond dispute that Josephus gives helpful context to our study of the Jewish people in the late Second Temple era, and no matter which date you accept for Mark's writing it is within less than decades, but Josephus was a revolution away from Jesus. Moreover, the quotation is taken from the Septuagint translation - completed around two hundred years before Josephus. Mark or Jesus could only have chose a different word for 'robbers' if they wanted to make a point that they were not brigands. The use of *lestes* in a technical sense later does not preclude the primary, generic meaning of the word. It seems more obvious to read that Jesus is accusing the temple group of Sadducees of the same crimes as the Jerusalemites that Jeremiah condemns – using the temple as a base and authorisation for their metaphorical raids of thieving, with the same results as an outlaw raid.²⁵

5 Cleansing: Idols and sacrifices

Idolatry was the reason for two cleansings in the history of the temple, perhaps that could be the reason for Jesus' action. Josiah (2 Kings 23) and Judas Maccabaeus (1 Macc 4:36-59) both removed idols from the temple, and some have sought to link this action with the feast of Hanukkah, which celebrated this dedication to God.²⁶ Yet the temple seems to have been purer than at any previous time. The zeal of the Jews led to the Eagle placed above the temple by Herod in 4BC being pulled down by the students of two Pharisee teachers²⁷ – no idolatry was permitted. The eagle crest on the Tyrrian shekel has been identified by some as the object of Jesus' wrath,²⁸ but why then attack the dove-sellers? It may be argued that all sacrifice and worship in the temple had been tainted by idolatry if even the tax that sustained the temple was compromised, but Jesus' quotation of scripture does not help to support this viewpoint. Only in the wider context of Jeremiah 7 are idols mentioned; if Jesus had wanted to make a point about idolatry he could have used those words more directly.

20 Bauckham, 'Demonstration', 77.

21 Wright, *Victory*, 420.

22 Sanders, *Judaism*, 66; Borg, *Conflict*, 174.

23 Wright, *Victory*, 420.

24 Wright, *Victory*, 420.

25 See Bauckham, 'Demonstration', 84.

26 Edwards, *Mark*, 264-265.

27 Borg, *Conflict*, 38.

28 Richardson, *Jewish*, 247.

Other interpretations have suggested that Jesus was attacking the institution of sacrifice itself. It could be suggested that Jesus wanted to stop the ‘external’ things of religion, like sacrifice and collecting tax, to focus people on the ‘internal’ aspects, like prayer. Support may be claimed from the phrase ‘house of prayer’, but this is an anachronistic understanding of what religion, prayer, sacrifice and purity meant to Jews of the first century.²⁹ Prayer and sacrifice were inextricably linked. To sacrifice was to pray – right from the dedication of the first temple by Solomon the two were simultaneous. When Isaiah spoke of the temple being a house of prayer, the link in the hearers’ mind was to the prayer of Solomon and his prayer that God would hear every prayer directed to the temple (1 Kings 8:22-61), even from a foreigner, and accept the sacrifices offered there, making it His home. Jesus was not seeking to cleanse the temple of sacrifice; to end sacrifice would be to end the temple and Judaism as they knew it.

6 A big deal?

In Mark’s version, Jesus goes further than the other gospels, by not allowing anything to be carried through the temple. Some have suggested that Jesus took offence at the use of the temple as a short cut through Jerusalem,³⁰ while others think that this was to stop the movement of sacred cult objects used in worship,³¹ effectively shutting down the sacrifice and worship of the temple. Many explanations of the temple action hinge around Jesus disrupting the buying and selling of animals and the movement of essential goods for the offerings; that he ‘effected ... a brief cessation of sacrifice’.³² In our ‘Sunday School’ image of the scene, the temple is barely bigger than a village parish church and Jesus stops everyone, whatever they are doing - buying, selling, trading, sacrifice.

At this stage it is important to remember the scale of the temple complex that we are talking about. The temple complex ‘approximated a rhomboid equivalent in area to thirty-five football pitches.’³³ It was a vast area and an immense amount of trade must have gone on to supply the huge numbers of animals for sacrifice – ‘a single merchant once offered three thousand sheep for sale in the temple court’.³⁴ In the grand outer court of the temple, over 300m wide, nothing less than a “paramilitary or mob action involving scores of followers (possibly more) using force” could have cleared the temple courts and stopped all sacrifice.³⁵

Furthermore, we must remember the temple police and Roman garrison in the Fortress Antonia nearby. Josephus tells how extra watches of soldiers were placed on the roofs of the porticoes to monitor the outer courts during the ‘great festivals’ and we know that a broad stairway connected the outer court to the fortress specifically so any trouble in those excitable times could easily be put down.³⁶

29 Sanders, *Judaism*, 68.

30 Witherington, *Mark*, 314.

31 Hooker, *Mark*, 342.

32 Wright, *Victory*, 423.

33 Wise, ‘Temple’, 812.

34 Witherington, *Mark*, 315.

35 Borg, *Conflict*, 172, see also Hengel, *Revolutionist*, 17.

36 Hengel, *Revolutionist*, 16.

The Romans took temple worship very seriously, whichever god the temple was dedicated to. The temple in Jerusalem offered sacrifices on behalf of (or to, depending on your perspective) the Roman Emperor. To interrupt that would have been high treason, punishable by death. It is clear that the Romans would have stepped in if a riot broke out to the scale that all sacrifices were stopped,³⁷ even for a very brief time.

It seems much more sensible to recognise that this was in fact a symbolic action, in the tradition of the enacted prophecies of the Old Testament.³⁸ Most of the commentators on the passage accept that the temple action was symbolic and representational rather than a demonstration of force with a big impact.

7 Destruction

By ‘attacking the temple service which was commanded by God’,³⁹ Sanders argues that Jesus sought to show that God no longer accepted the sacrifices being offered and that it pointed to the destruction of the temple. The Jews had a firm belief that God would protect and vindicate the temple and its cult, as the dedication celebrations mentioned earlier show. They were sure that while they were able to worship God and offer sacrifices to Him, His aid was certain and no calamity could befall – just like their ancestors in Jeremiah’s day. It was this faith that surprised Titus when it led the defenders of Jerusalem to ask for passage out of the siege once the temple had been taken in 70 AD. With the temple captured and desecrated, they knew that God would not save Jerusalem, even though the positions the zealots occupied were unassailable.⁴⁰ For Sanders and others like N.T. Wright, Jesus’ action in the temple was aimed to stop sacrifice for a short time, showing that God was no longer present and destruction was immanent.

As we have discussed above, it is difficult to accept that, even for the shortest of times, sacrifice was halted. Furthermore, an attack on the peripheral functions of the temple would not have been an effective way to stop sacrifices. Clearly the temple’s smooth running depended on finance and the flow of animals to the altar, but attacking the priests themselves or the movement of the animal carcasses would have been both more obvious and more effective. But physically attacking the altar or priests would have been a direct attack on the service and worship of God, and it seems that was not Jesus’ agenda at this moment.

The violent act of driving out the traders and money-changers is seen as pre-figuring the violence of the temple’s destruction by some readers. Yet Jesus’ ‘destructive action’ was very limited – scripture does not speak of property damaged or people injured. Perhaps we might argue that the evangelists have sanitised their telling of the events, yet that does not explain why Jesus’ violence was not met with violence. There was historic precedent for destructive actions that symbolised destruction, for example the sign of the smashed pot in Jeremiah 19. A similar action, or a reference to such an action would make it clear to us that Jesus intended to act out a prophecy of destruction.

37 Hooker, *Mark*, 342.

38 Sanders, *Judaism*, 69.

39 Sanders, *Judaism*, 70.

40 Josephus, *War*, 5.11.1-7.2.2, cited in Gundry, *Mark*, 755.

Tellingly, the quotation that Mark gives us to explain Jesus' teaching in explanation of his action does not mention destruction directly, even though we know that this was a theme of his teaching in the coming days (see Mark 13:1-2). The reference to Jeremiah 7 does give a hint at destruction and judgement, yet the prophecy of Jeremiah is against the people, specifically their religious leaders, rather than against the temple itself.

8 A Withered Fig Tree

To understand more clearly what Jesus is doing in the temple, we must look at the context in which we read the story in Mark's Gospel. 'Sandwiched' around the temple action is a strange story about a cursed fig tree being withered. There is some debate over whether Mark chose to create a "sandwich" interpolation with two originally separate stories or whether he inherited them together from one document. Witherington and others suggest that the two stories do not belong together chronologically,⁴¹ but rather have been placed together to create suspense and set up a symbolic framework for the events of Mark 11.⁴² Essler counters by exploring how the stories could have come together in a 'Last Days of Jesus' document, put together in Jerusalem at least 20-30 years before Mark wrote his Gospel.⁴³ Essler's analysis concludes by suggesting that the cursing of the fig tree was a difficult pericope for Mark, but so well known that he felt unable to leave it out. He 'struggled' to include it and provide it with meaning with the sayings about faith and prayer (22-25).⁴⁴ Telford considers the possibility of a pre-Markan source supplying the two stories together but in analysing the 'seams', is confident that the sandwich technique⁴⁵ is the best explanation for this passage.

It seems that this conventional analysis of the passage as a redactional 'sandwich' feature makes better sense of the wider context of the triumphant entry into Jerusalem and the temple complex followed by teaching and disputes in the temple. The temple action forms the centre of a wider structure which has been described as a 'triple intercalation' by Brown.⁴⁶ While this study of the structure is useful, a more classic chiasmic structure is plainly seen.

A: Pilgrims welcome Jesus to Jerusalem (Mk 11:1-11)

B: Fig tree is cursed (Mk 11:12-13)

C: Temple Action (Mk 11:14-19)

B': Fig tree is found withered (Mk 11:20-25)

A': Jesus is challenged by the temple authorities (Mk 11:27-12:12)⁴⁷

Luke did not feel that the fig tree episode was so important and well known that it had to be included in his telling of Jesus' life, although Matthew seems to agree that it belongs with the temple action. However,

41 Witherington, *Mark*, 312.

42 Painter, *Mark*, 151.

43 Essler 'Incident', 42.

44 Essler, 'Incident', 58, 67.

45 Identified in nine passages by Edwards, *Mark*, 11 n20.

46 Brown, 'Intercalation', 78.

47 After Telford's arrangement, *Temple*, 40-41.

Matthew chooses to separate the stories so that the temple action follows the fig tree event (in Matt 21:12-22), suggesting that he too believes the two stories are in some way mutually interpretive.⁴⁸

The fig tree event itself ties the commentators up in knots. It seems a very uncharacteristic miracle for the Jesus of the canonical gospels - capricious, petulant and downright unreasonable.⁴⁹ It is called the 'only "negative" miracle' of Jesus, where Jesus' word brings death rather than life and salvation. Hooker suggests that some commentators try to dismiss it as out of character for Jesus and therefore inauthentic. Others explain it as an aetiological legend of a dead tree near Jerusalem,⁵⁰ a misunderstanding of Jesus by the disciples, an acted parable or a story that evolved from a parable.⁵¹ Mark's editorial comment that 'it was not the season for figs' suggests that the wider narrative should be interpreted symbolically.⁵² It is essential, therefore, to look at the symbolism that the watching disciples would have understood.

One passage that seems very helpful to explaining the event is Jeremiah 8. The prophet speaks of destruction coming to Judah,

'When I would gather them, declares the LORD,
there are no grapes on the vine,
nor figs on the fig tree;
even the leaves are withered,
and what I gave them has passed away from them.'

Other Old Testament passages make it clear that the fig is an eschatological symbol of God's blessing on Israel.⁵³ Telford is confident that 'Mark's readers ... would readily have understood Jesus' cursing of the barren fig-tree as at the very least a judgement upon Israel. He goes further to argue that 'Mark intends the fig-tree to symbolize ... Israel's temple and its cultus.'⁵⁴

Jesus comes to the tree expecting to find fruit because the tree was full of leaves and finds none. Because of this, he curses the tree, and when they return the next day they find that it has withered. In Matthew's telling of the event the withering is instantaneous, and in Mark it is done by the next morning – a miraculously fast effect. For it is not simply the leaves that have died, but the tree is "withered away to its roots" - the whole tree is dead, dry and fit only for the fire (see John 15:6; Matt 3:10, 7:19; Luke 3:9).

9 Interpreting the Tree and the Temple together

The structure of the two events sandwiched together indicates that they are to be read as mutually interpretative. We will continue to explore a narrative interpretation that sails a line between cleansing and destruction, using the chiasmic structure outlined above.

48 Telford, *Temple*, 82.

49 France, *Mark*, 439 makes a link with the 'vindictive behaviour of the holy child as narrated in the ... *Gospel of Thomas*'.

50 See Essler, 'Incident' 62-65.

51 Hooker, *Mark*, 261.

52 Hooker, *Mark*, 262.

53 Telford, *Temple*, 132-134.

54 Telford, *Temple*, 136-137.

A: Jesus is welcomed by pilgrims outside of the city and enters the temple (for the first time in Mark's gospel). He looks around 'at everything' and goes out to Bethany to sleep. What he sees is lots of action: animals, sacrifice, money being given, people flooding in an out; what he does not see is true worship. The focus is on the wrong things - on giving the right impression of holiness and purity rather than the heart of the commands themselves. This distinction is not a platonic or gnostic division between fleshly and spiritual worship but divides action and intention in the vein of many Old Testament prophets.

B: Jesus sees a fig tree with masses of leaves that speak of life but no fruit. He curses it. It is the abundance of life in the leaves that attracts his attention – they are necessary for the fruit to grow, but when he looks closely there is nothing. It is not that the fruit is unripe or not ready, there are not even buds of fruit to come. The tree is a metaphor for the temple – it has an outward appearance of life but the results are not there.

C: Jesus acts out a symbolic demonstration that the life of the temple cannot be measured by the trade or the amount of money collected for the temple. The size or grandeur of buildings and the buzz of activity do not please God alone, especially when violence is in the hearts of even the leaders. By attacking the traders, Jesus points out the focus on the peripheral life of the temple instead of real worship and the need for repentance. Like the Old Testament prophets, the hint at destruction is balanced by the eschatological hope that the temple could be a house of prayer for all nations and the opportunity for cleansing and repentance.

B': The fig tree is found withered. Jesus teaches about prayer and forgiveness. The disciples are to have faith in God, not in the temple, just as Jeremiah taught.

A': Jesus is rejected by the temple leadership - they understand Jesus is challenging them and they have no plans to change. They challenge his authority to act and speak rather than what he is saying and doing. In a masterful turn-around, Jesus asks them of their opinion of another challenger, John the Baptist, forcing them to back off. The rejection by the leaders is the opposite of the welcome by the pilgrims, who are outsiders.

10 Conclusion

We have explored Jesus' temple action in Mark's gospel in the context of the wider structure of the surrounding days. We have seen that Jesus' cursing of the fig tree for the appearance of abundant life but no prospect of fruit mirrors the trading in the temple that he attacks to direct people towards worship. This attack forms an enacted prophecy of destruction when taken with the fig tree, but also a 'cleansing' in the sense that it pointed people towards how they should repent to avoid that judgement. The leaders of the Jews understood the action as a threat and treated Jesus as many Old Testament prophets were treated – with threats and eventual death.

We have not been able to explore in detail the differences in the parallel texts, or the parable that Luke recounts of a fruitless fig tree (Luke 13:6-9). In exploring these texts in more detail we may find out more

about the emphases of the evangelists and their understanding of Jesus' actions. We could go further than this paper in not only discussing what Mark is saying Jesus was doing in the temple, but what his intent for his readers was. A wider exploration of Jesus' attitude to the temple in Mark's gospel would need to take in other passages in the coming passages, not least the parable of the tenants chapter 12, the foretelling of destruction in chapter 13 and the trial in chapter 14.

Word count: 4998

Bibliography

- Borg, Marcus J, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus*, Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1984.
- Brown, Scott G, 'Mark 11:1–12:12: A Triple Intercalation? ', *CBQ*, Jan 2002, Vol. 64 Issue 1, 78-89.
- Bauckham, Richard, 'Jesus' Demonstration in the Temple' in B Lindars (ed.), *Law and Religion: Essays on the Place of the Law in Israel and Early Christianity*, Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 1988, 72-89.
- Chilton, Bruce and Craig A Evans, 'Jesus and Israel's Scriptures', in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research*, Leiden: Brill, 1994, 281-335.
- Chilton, Bruce, *The Temple of Jesus: His sacrificial program within a cultural history of sacrifice*, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania University Press, 1992.
- Edwards, James R, *Gospel According to Mark*, Leicester: Apollos, 2002.
- Essler, Philip F, 'The Incident of the Withered Fig Tree in Mark 11: A New Source and Redactional Explanation', *JSNT*, 28.1 (2005), 41-67.
- Evans, Craig A, 'Jesus' action in the temple: cleansing or portent of destruction?', *CBQ*, 51.2 Apr 1989, 237-270.
- Evans, Craig A, 'Jesus and the "cave of robbers": toward a Jewish context for the temple action', *BBR*, 3 1993, 93-110.
- France, Richard T, *The Gospel of Mark: A commentary on the Greek text*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.
- Gundry, Robert H, *Mark: A commentary on his apology for the cross*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992.
- Hengel, Martin, *Was Jesus a Revolutionist?*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975.
- Hooker, Morna D, *The Gospel According to Mark*, London: A & C Black, 1991.
- Painter, John, *Mark's Gospel: Worlds in conflict*, London: Routledge, 1997.
- Richardson, Peter, *Building Jewish in the Roman East*, Waco: Baylor University Press, 2004.
- Sanders, E P, *Jesus and Judaism*, London: SCM Press, 1985.
- Telford, William R, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree*, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980.
- Wise, M O, 'Temple' in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992.
- Witherington, Ben, *The Gospel of Mark: A socio-rhetorical commentary*, Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2001.
- Wright, N T, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, London: SPCK, 1996.