

RE-IMAGINING THE PRESENCE OF GOD:
THE TEMPLE AND THE MESSIAH
IN THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW

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ABSTRACT

The treatment of the temple theme illuminates how the Gospel of Matthew uses a fundamental institution of Judaism in order to transfer part of its function to the person of Jesus. Themes that are alluded to already in the temptation of Jesus and in the pericope concerning the Sabbath in the grain field are developed in the Jerusalem controversies. The cleansing of the temple serves to illustrate Jesus' vision of the temple; the word over the destruction of the temple clarifies not only the rejection of Jewish leaders, but also God's exodus from the temple as a result. The sacrificial language of the last supper and the trial before Pilate suggest that Jesus himself becomes the definitive sacrificial victim for the salvation of his people, an impression reinforced by the eschatological signs at his death. For Matthew, christology is the legitimate successor to a Jewish temple theology. For Matthew, christology ensures the continuity of Judaism after the destruction of Jerusalem.

INTRODUCTION: JESUS BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE JERUSALEM TEMPLE GAVE RISE TO AN EXTENSIVE body of Jewish literature reflecting on the consequences of this catastrophe for Judaism.¹ The literature of early Christianity was affected by these trends, particularly in the light of Jesus' critical attitude to the temple.² While the Gospels of Mark, Luke and John try to downplay Jesus' criticism of the temple, Matthew tackles it head on in the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin (26:57–

¹ Examples for such writings are 2–3 Bar, 4 Esra, Apoc. Abr. “‘Why?’ and ‘whither?’ are the questions raised by these writers as they ponder the events of 70 C.E.,” George W. E. Nickelsburg, *Jewish Literature Between the Bible and the Mishnah. A Historical and Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981) 280.

² E. P. Sanders, “Jesus and the Temple,” in *The Historical Jesus in Recent Research* (ed. James D. G. Dunn and Scott McKnight; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005) 361–81.

68). In Matt 26:59–60 the Jewish elders are specifically looking for false testimony (ψευδομαρτυρίαν) yet do not find any that could convict Jesus. Finally, two witnesses appear who agree on Jesus' saying about tearing down the temple and rebuilding it in three days.³ The Matthean changes to Mark 14:53–65 are quite significant. First, Matthew specifies the number of the witnesses as two.⁴ Second, he removes the remark that the two give a false statement (Mark 14:59). Third, he changes the Markan καταλύσω τὸν ναὸν τοῦτον (14:58) into δύναμαι καταλύσαι (26:61). Lastly, while Mark refers to the temple as handmade (χειρωποίητον), for Matthew it is God's temple (τοῦ θεοῦ). These changes indicate that Matthew regards the two witnesses as truthful,⁵ using ὕστερον to effect a definite change in the proceedings of the trial, leading up to a first climax.⁶ Matthew stands the Markan account on its head, as Gundry writes: "Mark says that the Sanhedrin sought true testimony and found false, Matthew says that they sought false testimony and found true."⁷ This surprising Matthean twist on the temple word is only explainable if it fits into an overall narrative strategy of the Gospel. It is this strategy that interests us now.

THE TEMPTATION OF JESUS: MATT 4:5–7

The first explicit appearance of the temple occurs in 4:5 in the context of the temptation of Jesus. It certainly exhibits a great deal of irony that Jesus' first encounter with the place of his great conflict with the Jewish leaders is caused by Satan, who stands him on the topmost turret of the temple to prove his di-

³ Eleven times Matthew calls the temple τὸ ἱερόν and nine times ὁ ναός. If there are parallels in the Synoptic Gospels to Matthew's passages, there are no variants, except for 23:35. In material proper to Matthew, both terms occur with about equal frequency. It is doubtful that the terminological difference relates shadings in meaning, even if such is suggested by the LXX's avoidance of ἱερόν in reference to the Jerusalem temple. Gottlob Schrenk, "ἱερός, κτλ," *ThWNT* III (1942) 221–84; Otto Michel, "Ναός," *ThWNT* IV (1942) 884–95.

⁴ Mark 14:57 just mentions τινες. The number two ensures the reliability of the witnesses, as specified in Deut 19:15. This allusion is used in Matt 18:16 as well. Similar texts are Deut 17:6 and 11QT^a 61:6–12.

⁵ There is some discussion whether the phrase ὕστερον δὲ προσελθόντες δύο in 60b refers to people different from those mentioned in πολλῶν προσελθόντων ψευδομαρτύρων in 60a, or whether they are liars just like the others. The discussion is summarised by Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (4 vols; EKK I; Zürich: Benziger, Neukirchener Verlag, 1985–2002) IV, 175–76. Luz opts for different people, as do William D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (3 vols; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988–97) III, 525. Some manuscripts infer that the two last ones are equally liars, and insert after δύο: ψευδομαρτύρες (see (A) C D f 33 m latt sy), or τινες ψευδομαρ (see N W 1241 al (sy)). The usual reading is attested by κ B L ⊕ fpc sy co.

⁶ "The climactic ὕστερον is characteristic" of Matthew's language. Davies and Allison, *Matthew* III, 525.

⁷ Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 542.

vine sonship by a flight over Jerusalem. Matthew emphasises the holiness of the city⁸ and thus by extension the holiness of the temple.⁹ According to Jewish tradition, the temple occupied the centre of the city of Jerusalem,¹⁰ while Jerusalem was at the centre of the world.¹¹ Matthew's focus lies on the definition of Jesus' relationship to God. Satan's introduction εἰ υἱὸς εἶ τοῦ θεοῦ (4:6) already makes this palpable, yet Jesus prefers to define it through his obedience to God's will. He will do exactly the same later on in Gethsemane during his solitary prayer (26:39, 42) and arrest (26:53–54). Further on in the narrative, the mockers under the cross will use the words of Satan to tempt Jesus into descending from the cross, while he again obediently follows the will of God to the end (27:40). Jesus' answer to Satan emphasises that jumping from the turret would amount to tempting God himself. Thus, the first appearance of the temple gives Matthew the opportunity to stress the holiness of the city. Her temple is the place where the obedience to the will of God defines Jesus. The nature of Jesus as the Son of God is not something predicated of him, as Satan does. It appears in an obedience, which finally leads Jesus to the cross and to death.

SABBATH IN A GRAIN FIELD: MATT 12:1–8

The second appearance of the temple enmeshes the reader again in christological issues. Matthew redacts the Markan controversy (Mark 2:23–28) regarding the plucking of grain, not only with the usual stylistic improvements, but also through the addition of the example of the priests doing service in the temple and the quotation of Hos 6:6.¹² Matthew must have viewed the Markan story with considerable discomfort. Mark tries to solve the legal issue of the plucking of grain on a Sabbath with a story about David eating the loaves of the sanctuary and, in the end, he even questions the validity of the Sabbath in general. But the story of David has serious shortcomings. Mark does not get the name of the priest right. The story as it appears in 1 Sam 21:2–7 is not concerned with the Sabbath obligation, but with sexual purity. Furthermore, the story is only of haggadic significance, it cannot be used to lay down a ruling

⁸ Different from Luke 4:9, Matthew speaks of εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν πόλιν, as he does in 27:53. We can safely assume a redactional feature which takes its cue from OT passages like Isa 48:2; 52:1; Neh 11:1; Dan 9:24; 2 Macc 3:1; Qoh 49:6; Tob 13:9; Jer 1:6. Davies and Allison, *Matthew* I, 365.

⁹ A parallel to such a concept is found in 11QT^a 45–47 where the city is merely an extension of the temple precinct.

¹⁰ Josephus, *Ap.* 1.196–98.

¹¹ Ezek 5:5; 38:12; *Jub.* 8:19; *1 Enoch* 26:1; *Sib. Or.* 5.248–50.

¹² For a more detailed redaction-critical analysis, see Boris Repschinski, *The Controversy Stories in the Gospel of Matthew: Their Redaction, Form, and Relevance for the Relationship between the Matthean Community and Formative Judaism*, (FRLANT 189; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2000) 94–107.

concerning matters of the law.¹³ However, Matthew is interested in such a discussion of the law. His own argument takes up the priestly functions in the temple on the Sabbath. Already the phrase οὐκ ἀνέγνωτε ἐν τῷ νόμῳ (12:5) clarifies that Matthew introduces here a halachic argument of relevance to the issue of Sabbath observance. The argument itself aims at the perfect observance of the Sabbath; it does not suggest that Matthew wishes to abrogate it (cf. 5:17–20).

Matthew turns the argument deriving from the temple priests into a christological argument. He first observes that the priests in the temple are innocent despite their breaking the Sabbath (12:5). Next, the Matthean Jesus claims that something greater than the temple is here. Thus, the Pharisees have judged innocent ones (12:7). In the comparison with the priests in the temple service, Matthew has created a classic *qal-wa-homer* argument,¹⁴ though sometimes seen as an unhappy one.¹⁵ However, it allows Matthew to stretch the argument further than just the problem of the Sabbath. If the disciples are really comparable to the priests, then the question arises as to what is comparable to the temple in the sense that it is μεῖζον. Because the word is a neuter, it has been variously described as the kingdom of God, the love of God, Jesus' interpretation of the Law, the community of the disciples, or the mercy mentioned in 12:7 and Hos 6:6.¹⁶ However, the structure of the argument does not make these options plausible. If it is the relationship of the priests to the temple that lets them remain innocent, then it is highly probable that it is the relationship of the disciples to Jesus which makes them as innocent as those priests. Thus, the neuter refers to Jesus.¹⁷ The use of the neuter results from a focus on the person of Jesus that also takes his ministry and teaching into view.¹⁸ As the temple

¹³ David Daube, *The New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1956) 68; William D. Davies, *The Setting of the Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966) 103; D. M. Cohn-Sherbok, "An Analysis of Jesus' Arguments Concerning the Plucking of Grain on the Sabbath," *JSNT* 37 (1979) 36.

¹⁴ The argument *a minore ad maius* is a classic method of halachic discussions, already laid down in the 7 *middot* of Hillel. Günter Stemberger, *Einleitung in Talmud und Midrasch* (8th ed.; München: C. H. Beck, 1992) 19–23.

¹⁵ Scholars object to the comparisons between the priests and the disciples and between the temple and Jesus. See, for example, Cohn-Sherbok, "Jesus' Arguments" 39; Gundry, *Matthew* 224.

¹⁶ For the various positions and their summaries, see Luz, *Matthäus* II, 231; Repschinski, *Controversy Stories* 99–100. Luz himself opts for mercy but, as a consequence, he has to break up the structure of the argument presented by Jesus.

¹⁷ Similarly, the formulations in 12:41, 42 καὶ ἰδοὺ πλεῖον ... ὥδε should be interpreted in a similar fashion as christologically motivated, but taking not only the person but also the ministry and teaching of Jesus into account. Davies and Allison (*Matthew* II, 314) agree with the current reading, since otherwise 12:8 would not make sense.

¹⁸ Gundry (*Matthew* 223) suggests that the neuter "stresses the quality of superior greatness rather than Jesus' personal identity."

guarantees the innocence of the priests working in it even on a Sabbath, so the disciples are innocent through the presence of Jesus. Matthew argues that Jesus has the same function towards his disciples as the temple to the priests.

At the same time, Matthew attacks the Pharisees for their spotty knowledge of the Law. Three times Matthew alludes to their deficient knowledge of scripture (12:3, 5, 7). The last of these takes up Jesus' admonition to the Pharisees to go and learn what Hos 6:6 means (9:13). The lack of knowledge on the side of the Pharisees is not accidental, but a direct result of disobedience to a command of Jesus. This disobedience, then, leads not only to the condemnation of the innocent disciples, but also of the innocent priests. Matthew shows how the Pharisees' refusal to listen to the teaching of Jesus and to his way of interpreting the Law through the prophets¹⁹ (see also 5:17) ends up as an attack against one of the basic institutions of Judaism, the temple.

CONFLICT IN JERUSALEM: MATT 21–22

Only when the narrative moves into Jerusalem does the temple finally reappear in the Gospel. Jesus' first action in Jerusalem is the cleansing of the temple, which is prepared for by the solemn entry into Jerusalem. Matthew is the only one of the Synoptics who explains the entry with a quotation from scripture to highlight the royal nature of Jesus (21:5), which corresponds to the acclamation of Jesus as the son of David (21:9). This introduction to the ministry adds enormous weight to the following cleansing of the temple. The Matthean Jesus does not hesitate to take immediate action against inappropriate conditions in the temple.²⁰ At the same time, the first action of Jesus plays out in two acts that show how Matthew understands the two titles of King and Son of David given to Jesus during the entry into Jerusalem.

The first act is the cleansing of the temple (21:12–13), which Matthew changes dramatically from the Markan account. Even though Jesus still throws over the tables of the money changers and drives out the salesmen, Matthew omits the reference to the carrying of objects through the temple precincts (Mark 11:16). Matthew also omits $\pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\iota\nu\ \tau\omicron\iota\varsigma\ \epsilon\theta\nu\epsilon\sigma\iota\nu$ from the quotation of Isa 56:7.²¹ For Matthew, the temple is not a house of prayer for the Gentiles, but the omission probably also reflects on a historical situation in which the temple was already destroyed. The greatest change against the Markan pericope is the removal of the story of the barren fig tree as a frame for the cleansing of the temple. The Markan arrangement suggests that he views the

¹⁹ For a still very useful analysis of the Matthean approach to the Law, see Alexander Sand, *Das Gesetz und die Propheten* (Regensburg: Pustet, 1974).

²⁰ Compare and contrast the account in Mark 11, where Jesus first of all looks around the temple, then retires for the night only to begin his actions of the following day.

²¹ In the LXX the relevant passage reads $\acute{\omicron}\ \gamma\acute{\alpha}\rho\ \delta\iota\acute{\omicron}\kappa\omicron\varsigma\ \mu\omicron\upsilon\ \delta\iota\acute{\omicron}\kappa\omicron\varsigma\ \pi\rho\omicron\sigma\epsilon\upsilon\chi\eta\varsigma\ \kappa\lambda\eta\theta\eta\sigma\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota\ \pi\acute{\alpha}\sigma\iota\nu\ \tau\omicron\iota\varsigma\ \epsilon\theta\nu\epsilon\sigma\iota\nu$.

cleansing in terms of a judgment over the temple and the institutions connected with it.²² This led some scholars to view the Matthean pericope in the same terms.²³ However, the Matthean emphasis in the story becomes clearer in the second act of the story.

After the cleansing of the temple, the blind and lame come to Jesus for healing, and children appear, who acclaim Jesus as the son of David (21:14–17). At the same time, some chief priests and elders appear, who take offence at precisely these events (21:15: ἰδόντες δὲ ... τὰ θαυμάσια ... καὶ τοὺς παῖδας τοὺς κράζοντας ... ἠγανάκτησαν). In an ironic twist of narrative, Matthew shows how the children have knowledge about the truth concerning Jesus, while the chief priests and elders, the same people who knew exactly about the newborn king in 2:6, are here unable to recognise Jesus for what he is: the healing son of David. The quotation of Ps 8:3 (21:16) underlines the truth of the children's call and identifies the children as representatives of God who "prepares praise for himself."²⁴

It is no accident that Matthew places this event in the temple. If the temple is the place of worship and prayer, in which God is praised and called holy, then those who are officially appointed to be agents of God in the temple fail completely and utterly. Not only are they remiss in overseeing the proper conduct in the temple as a house of prayer, but God himself dismisses them as those preparing praise for himself, choosing instead children, the blind and the lame. As chief priests and elders refuse to see Jesus as what he is, God himself declares them superfluous.

The cleansing of the temple and the healing of blind and lame is not so much a judgment over the temple as a judgment over chief priests and elders. But, at the same time, Matthew also explains how the temple ought to function positively. Against the den of thieves as the negative foil, Matthew places his vision of a temple as a place of the royal son of David who enters a house of prayer, who heals the blind and the lame and where God prepares praise for himself out of the mouth of babes. While the Markan frame with the barren fig tree makes the cleansing an act of prophetic judgment, the Matthean frame of the cleansing through the entry of the royal son of David and his acclamation in the temple through the children makes of the temple a place of christological importance. Matthew offers the reader two alternatives. The first is the temple

²² William R. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Fig Tree* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980).

²³ So, for example, R. T. France, *Matthew: Evangelist and Teacher* (New Testament Profiles; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1989) 215.

²⁴ The NT used allusions to Ps 8 quite frequently; cf. 1 Cor 15:27; Eph 1:22; Heb 2:6–9. Possible allusions are present in Phil 3:21 and 1 Pet 3:22. The quotations of Ps 8 in the NT are all used for making a christological point, as indeed is the case in Matthew. C. H. Dodd, *Scriptures of the Old Testament in the New* (London: Athlone, 1952) 32–34.

of chief priests and elders, a den of thieves. The second is the temple of Jesus as a place of worship, healing and praise.²⁵

It is these two greatly differing visions of the temple that are always in the background of the following Jerusalem controversy stories. All of them take place in the temple, where the vision of chief priests, elders, Sadducees, scribes and Pharisees is contrasted with the vision of Jesus. The first controversy makes this already abundantly clear. After a night in Bethany, Jesus returns to the temple. The barren fig tree (21:19–22) has now become the prelude to the controversies with the Jewish leaders. The approach of chief priests and elders is described in terms of almost waylaying Jesus as soon as he enters the temple again in 21:23: καὶ ἐλθόντος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸ ἱερόν προσῆλθον αὐτῷ διδάσκοντι. At the same time, the formulation suggests that they disturb Jesus' teaching activity in the temple. The challenge of the chief priests and elders is a double one, first about the kind of authority that Jesus exhibits, and secondly about its source. Again, Matthew operates with some irony. The chief priests and elders are supposedly the ones with authority in the temple. Yet their refusal to answer Jesus' question about the Baptist undermines their authority quite clearly, since it becomes obvious that the leaders' source of authority is not God but their opportunism fuelled by fear of the crowds. It is Jesus who teaches with authority in the temple, not the Jewish leaders.

This theme of authority underlies all the Jerusalem controversies. In each one, Jesus appears as the one vested with superior authority, while the leaders are revealed as impostors. Very poignantly, this comes once more to the fore in the last controversy story (22:41–46). For the first time, it is Jesus himself who asks a question, and it concerns the interpretation of scripture. How is Ps 110:2 to be interpreted, where David calls the Messiah master and yet is supposedly his father? The opponents cannot answer, and their silence is described as final and definitive (21:46). Jesus is proven to be the master of his opponents in the temple, on their home turf. Yet the question of 12:6 still looms: how is Jesus greater than the temple? Matthew answers this in his assessment of the destruction of the temple.

“NOT ONE STONE UPON ANOTHER”: MATT 24:1–2

Still in the temple, Matthew follows the silencing of the opponents of Jesus with a discourse on the Pharisees and scribes as hypocrites and blind guides of the people of Israel. In his quest to delegitimise the Jewish leaders even further,

²⁵ The cleansing and the healing are of equal importance for this story of Jesus' first day in the temple. Thus, Luz is quite wrong when he writes that the cleansing of the temple “verliert im Matthäusevangelium an eigenem Gewicht. Sie hat vor allem die Funktion, die Kehrseite dessen zu sein, was Jesus im Tempel in der Erfüllung seiner messianischen Aufgabe an Israel tut, nämlich die Heilung seiner Kranken.” Luz, *Matthäus* III, 139.

Matthew draws out the implications of the Jerusalem controversies in his explicit condemnation of them.²⁶ Much of the material in Matthew 23 is exclusive to Matthew, although the concluding lament over Jerusalem (23:37–39) is probably traditional.²⁷ Its placement immediately following the condemnation of Pharisees and scribes is quite significant. Immediately preceding the lament the Pharisees and scribes are accused of committing the murder of prophets and, in general, of persecuting those who Jesus sends to them. When the lament now moves to Jerusalem as the one killing prophets and stoning messengers, it reiterates the accusations of 23:34 and now puts them into the context of the rejection of Jesus.²⁸ The rejection of Jesus is final, and they will not see him again (21:39). Its consequence is quite simple, it is the loss of the temple: ἰδοὺ ἀφίεται ὑμῖν ὁ οἶκος ὑμῶν ἔρημος (23:38).²⁹

The formulation of the loss of the temple (23:38) is remarkable in several respects. The introductory ἰδοὺ is an invitation to particular attention.³⁰ The present tense of ἀφίεται is a further striking detail. It is perhaps possible to see a prophetic mode reflected in the present tense,³¹ most certainly, however, it will call to the mind of Matthean readers the vividness of the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in the not too distant past. But perhaps most striking is the use of ὑμῖν, since it clarifies that Matthew sees the destruction of the temple as a terrible event that will befall the opponents of Jesus. It also implies

²⁶ Anthony J. Saldarini, "Delegitimation of Leaders in Matthew 23," *CBQ* 54 (1992) 649–80.

²⁷ Luke has a similar lament in 13:34–35. Luz, *Matthäus* III, 320; Davies and Allison, *Matthew* III, 320–24.

²⁸ In essence, then, the lament repeats the accusations against Pharisees and scribes, widens them against those who follow their teachings, but stops short of rejecting all of Israel.

²⁹ Secondary literature discusses whether οἶκος means Jerusalem, the temple, or the whole people of Israel. Jerusalem is argued by Alan H. McNeile, *The Gospel according to St Matthew* (London: Macmillan, 1915) 352; the temple is argued by Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus* (ThKNT; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1968) 497; for the people Israel, see Hermann Leberecht Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch* (4 Bde: München: Beck, 1951–56) I, 943–44. The discussion is summarised by Davies and Allison (*Matthew* III, 322–23). Within the Matthean narrative, the recourse to 21:13 and to the following reference to the temple (24:1–2) is the most obvious solution here. Texts like Ezra and 2 Bar do not always distinguish clearly between Jerusalem and the temple when they use οἶκος. Sometimes, the meaning oscillates between temple and city that one might speak of an identification of the two. See William D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Berkeley: University of California, 1974) 150–54. The use of the quotation of Ps 117:26a (LXX) also moves the temple into view, since 117:26b continues with a clear reference to the temple in the phrase ἐξ οἴκου κυρίου.

³⁰ Occasionally, prophetic threats are introduced with ἰδοὺ, as in 1 Sam 2:31 and Ezek 5:8.

³¹ Davies and Allison (*Matthew* III, 321) speak of "an expression of prophetic certainty."

a distance between these opponents and the Matthean disciples of Jesus. If it is they who will lose the temple, the question is: what do the disciples have that the opponents do not? Or put in another way: why would the end of the temple be such a loss for the opponents of Jesus, but not for his disciples?

A first hint is given in the quotation of Ps 117:26 (LXX). In its original form the Psalm refers to the beauties of temple worship, and our passage to the arrival of the king at the temple, who is blessed by those in the temple. Its continuation refers to blessings coming from the house of the Lord to the people. However, Matthew uses the quotation to work it into an eschatological saying that no longer speaks of blessings from the temple on the coming one but speaks of the future day when Jesus will come again.³² He also removes the notion that there will be a blessing coming from those in the temple and replaces it with a salvific promise attached to Jesus when he comes again. He who wanted to gather Jerusalem under his wings will, in the end time, come again to offer this salvation once more.³³ However, this salvation is not unconditionally offered but tied to the acceptance of Jesus.³⁴ The salvation of Israel is indeed the task of Jesus, which he will accomplish (Matt 1:21),³⁵ but Israel will have to accept him. This also implies obliquely that the temple will become unnecessary in the eschatological future. When Jesus is present to his people again, the temple will have ceased to be the place of worship. Only when the temple has become ἔρημος will the Messiah return to offer salvation.

³² As Davies and Allison (*Matthew III*, 322–23) rightly remark, at the time of the writing the temple was destroyed already and those in the temple could not bless the one who comes in the name of the Lord, Jesus. The eschatological overtones attributed by Matthew to the quotation they interpret in terms of preparation for the coming chapter.

³³ Some authors have seen this verse as a judgment on Israel: Joachim Gnllka, *Das Matthäusevangelium* (2 Bde; HthK.NT I; Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 1986–86) II, 305; John P. Meier, *The Vision of Matthew. Christ, Church and Morality in the First Gospel* (Theological Inquiries; New York, Ramsay, Toronto: Paulist, 1979) 275. Others have seen it in terms of holding out the promise of salvation: Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St Matthew* (London: R. Scott, 1915) 325; Gundry, *Matthew* 474.

³⁴ The ἕως ἄν denotes the condition under which salvation is offered. Davies and Allison, *Matthew III*, 324. Luz (*Matthäus III*, 384) opts for the saying as denoting judgment and offers several reasons: a) After the judgment contained in Matt 23, holding out hope for Israel would not be logical. This would be true if Matt 23 were indeed a judgment against all Israel. However, it is not. It is a discourse against Pharisees and scribes. b) Holding out salvation for Israel would be completely out of context within Matthew's Gospel. This is not so, since Matt 1:21 explicitly describes the task of the Messiah as the saving of τὸν λαὸν αὐτοῦ. c) It would be illogical to expect the Messiah to come when the Jerusalem people acclaim him; they can only acclaim him when they see him. This is the poorest argument of all, since the Messiah is present with his disciples and in the proclamation of his disciples.

³⁵ Boris Repschinski, "For He Will Save His People from Their Sins' (Matt 1:21). A Christology for Christian Jews," *CBQ* 68 (2006) 248–67.

A second detail in the Jerusalem word makes this even clearer. Though at the beginning of the Jerusalem controversies the temple is still referred to as the house of God, it now has become “your house” (23:38). By the end of the Jerusalem controversies, Jesus sees the temple as what his opponents have made of it. In Matt 21:13 the accusation of the sin of his opponents combines Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11 with the phrase ὑμεῖς δὲ αὐτὸν ποιεῖτε. The sin was to have made the temple into a den of thieves by rejecting the vision of Jesus for it. In 23:37 the opponents reject Jesus again, this time in his activity of gathering Jerusalem’s children, the people of Israel.³⁶ In 23:38 the consequence of the opponents’ sin now becomes clear: The temple is no longer “God’s house” but “your house” and, for this reason, is left ἔρημος, desolate, bereft, deserted. Matthew’s formulation with ἔρημος has no parallels.

If the temple is left deserted, then the question arises how the temple is left so. The obvious explanation is the destruction of the city during the Jewish war.³⁷ However, the word ἔρημος implies that somebody or something left it. A first hint is offered by ἀφίεται. Notable are both the passive voice and the present tense. The passive voice is most likely a *passivum divinum*.³⁸ This implies that God himself is leaving the temple. The present tense suggests that God’s withdrawal is happening at this very moment. At the end of the controversies with the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem Matthew explains that the temple is no longer the house of God but the house of those who have made it a den of thieves and do not notice that God is leaving the temple. Even though the Jewish leaders still sit in the temple, it is becoming a deserted place. The prophet Ezekiel offers a intriguing parallel. Ezek 9–11 describes how the glory of God first withdraws from the temple, then from the city to a mountain in the west of the city. Similar images of a temple deserted by God can be found in 2 Bar 8:2 and in Josephus, *B.J.* 6.299. The destruction of the temple is only the final consequence of God’s withdrawal from it.³⁹

The following instruction of the disciples (24:1–2) takes up the themes of the desertion and destruction of the temple. It begins with the solemn descrip-

³⁶ Davies and Allison (*Matthew* III, 320) note the relevant passages in the OT and other Jewish literature, paralleling this verse with God’s gathering and protecting activity.

³⁷ So Davies and Allison, *Matthew* III, 321.

³⁸ Luz, *Matthäus* III, 282.

³⁹ Gerd Theißen, *Lokalkolorit und Zeitgeschichte in den Evangelien: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (NTOA 8; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989) 231, dates the composition of Matt 23:38 before 70 C.E., since he infers that, with the knowledge about the destruction of the temple, the verse should have been formulated differently. This may be so, and the parallels suggest that the verse had a tradition before Matthew. However, Matthew inserts ἔρημος into it and thus makes it his own. Furthermore, the verse fits very well into the progression of Matthew’s narrative in describing that the withdrawal of God’s shekinah from the temple has something to do with Jesus’ leaving the temple.

tion of Jesus' withdrawal from the temple immediately following the lament over Jerusalem (24:1: καὶ ἐξέλιθον ... ἐπορεύετο). Only after leaving the temple do the disciples appear in the narrative in order to show Jesus the buildings, probably to make him aware of their beauty. The answer of Jesus (24:2) is two-pronged. First of all, he reminds the disciples that they do not understand what all this is about. When they see the buildings, they are blind to reality (οὐ βλέπετε ταῦτα πάντα). Second, he tells them that not a stone will remain upon another. The short apothegm serves as the connection between the judgment on Pharisees and scribes in Matt 23 and the preparation of the disciples for the end time in Matt 24:3–25:46.⁴⁰ The answer of Jesus, on the other hand, looks back to 23:38. There the main emphasis was on the withdrawal of God's presence from the temple. Matthew connects this now with the description of Jesus withdrawing from the temple as well, and with the prophecy of the complete destruction of the temple. As Jesus withdraws, the temple truly becomes desolate. The withdrawal of Jesus is the withdrawal of God's shekinah from the temple. Those still in the temple are truly desolate. Since the temple is no longer possessed of the presence of God as a consequence of rejecting Jesus and his message, it is given over to destruction. Matthew does not repudiate the temple as such. He explains the destruction of the temple in terms of his christology.⁴¹ The fate of the temple is decided in the fate of Jesus.

Matthew underlines this point in the story of the end of Judas. The story, filled with allusions to the OT,⁴² is placed somewhat unhappily⁴³ and finds no mention in the other gospels, although Acts 1:16–20 takes up some of its motifs. The story emphasises the innocence of Jesus even in the mouth of the one who has betrayed him (27:4), a theme taken up in the trial of Jesus two more times, once through the wife of Pilate, and once through Pilate himself (27:19, 24). With a prophetic gesture (Zech 11:13) Judas throws the money into the temple (27:5). The chief priests maintain that they have no responsibility for the events (27:4), but take the money anyway (27:6) and buy a field with it. The gesture of Judas probably has several meanings. First, the money goes back where it came from, the temple, which is already known as a den of thieves and a place for money changers. Furthermore, it is probable that the money which bought Jesus' blood now defiles the purity of the temple.⁴⁴ It is

⁴⁰ Davies and Allison, *Matthew* III, 333; Luz, *Matthäus* III, 386.

⁴¹ Davies and Allison (*Matthew* III, 334) state, "What we have here is not a repudiation of a divinely founded institution but a tragic forecast by Jerusalem's king of a disaster, fostered by human sin."

⁴² See the discussion in Davies and Allison, *Matthew* III, 558–59.

⁴³ It is difficult to understand how in 27:1–2 "all the chief priests and elders of the people" bring Jesus to Pilate, only to reappear in the temple to do business with Judas in 27:3. See Luz, *Matthäus* IV, 233.

⁴⁴ Davies and Allison (*Matthew* III, 564) find another allusion here to the destruction of the temple. This is possible, but not necessarily so.

again the Jewish leaders who are given responsibility for the death of Jesus.⁴⁵ And finally, the desolation of the temple is already made palpable in the image of the money that buys first the blood of Jesus and then that potters' field which comes to be named Field of Blood. Left in the hands of his opponents, the temple, already before its destruction, is no longer the sign of God living in the midst of his people, but merely associated with a burial ground for strangers.

FOR HERE IS SOMETHING GREATER THAN THE TEMPLE: MATT 27:51–54

The death of Jesus is accompanied by five eschatological signs (27:51–54) which are designed to prove its salvific nature. These signs are precursors to the final confirmation and validation of Jesus' mission in the resurrection.⁴⁶ The first of these signs is the complete tearing of the temple curtain into two parts (27:51). The exact meaning of the word καταπέτασμα is debated.⁴⁷ It could mean the outer curtain which separated the inner temple from the outer court, or it could mean the curtain separating the Holy of Holies. Matthew does not specify. Again he does not explain whether he sees this as a sign of the end of the temple cult⁴⁸ or as foreshadowing the destruction.⁴⁹ Yet one without the other is hardly plausible.⁵⁰ The important issue in the tearing of the temple curtain is that it follows the mocking of Jesus as the builder of a new temple (27:40). Thus, the death of Jesus is framed between two references to the temple.

The positioning of the tearing of the temple curtain immediately as the first sign after the death of Jesus again makes the connection between the temple and christological issues in the gospel quite palpable. In the death of Jesus, the temple loses the last pretensions to being a place of salvation, its emptiness can now be seen by all, its destruction has already begun. God himself has ended the temple's efficaciousness. The temple is no longer needed. The expiating

⁴⁵ Luz (*Matthäus* IV, 241) is quite right when he says that the Jewish leaders "und nicht Judas ... sind die Protagonisten des Bösen. Judas ist nur ihr Instrument."

⁴⁶ This is suggested by the passive voice used in the occurrences of each sign: ἐσχίσθη, ἐσείσθη, ἐσχίσθησαν, ἀνεώχθησαν, ἠγέρθησαν, ἐνεφανίσθησαν, ἐφοβήθησαν. It is likely that, with the exception of ἐνεφανίσθησαν, the *passivum divinum* is intended. "God now vindicates his son with a shower of astounding miracles." Davies and Allison, *Matthew* III, 629.

⁴⁷ A list of possible interpretations is given in Timothy Geddert, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* (JSNTSS; vol. 26; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989) 140–45.

⁴⁸ Plummer, *Matthew* 401; Douglas R. Hare, *The Theme of Jewish Persecution of Christians in the Gospel according to St Matthew* (SNTSMS 6; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967) 324.

⁴⁹ Davies and Allison, *Matthew* III, 631.

⁵⁰ David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NCB; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1972) 355; Gnllka, *Matthäusevangelium* II, 355; Luz, *Matthäus* IV, 363.

sacrifices of the temple are subsumed in the ministry of Jesus and his community in the forgiveness of sins sealed in the blood of the new covenant (Matt 26:28). Jesus finally fulfils his mission of saving his people from their sins (1:21). The subsequent signs are illustrative of this. They bear witness to the fact that earth and rocks make way for the resurrection of the holy ones. Finally, the captain of the guard and his men come to the knowledge that Jesus was the Son of God, not because of his death as in Mark 15:33, but because of the signs and wonders that validate Jesus' death as a salvific event. In the death of Jesus it becomes finally clear that, indeed, Jesus is greater than the temple.

CONCLUSION

Matthew consistently uses the temple to make statements about Jesus. He is not interested in creating a reimagination of the temple into the direction of his ἐκκλησία or a new people of God. Matthew tries to show that the Jerusalem temple has become unnecessary and superfluous, because Jesus is greater than the temple. In an historical situation where the temple is already destroyed, this is, in the end, a message of solace and hope. On the one hand, Matthew knows how to blame bad Jewish leadership for the catastrophe of the destruction. In this he is quite similar to other Jewish writings of the time,⁵¹ even if he describes their fault rather uniquely as not listening to Jesus. Through describing how God already leaves the temple at the rejection of Jesus by the authorities and not just at the destruction of the temple, he makes his point forcefully.

But Matthew tells not only of the destruction of the temple and the responsibility for it. He offers an alternative to the temple cult and a hope for the future in his narrative description of how the temple comes to subsist in the person of Jesus.⁵² Matthew exposes the old destroyed temple as a den of thieves, but he offers his own vision of the temple as realised in the person of Jesus. If the temple was the place where one went for reconciliation and forgiveness, now Jesus is the one offering God's healing and forgiveness. The temple was the place where the glory of God made its home, now the risen Jesus offers his own presence to the disciples until the end of the world (28:20). The old prophecy of the child that promises the presence of God by his name Emmanuel (1:23) is now fulfilled in the appearance of the risen Jesus. Jesus himself is the shekinah of God in the midst of his disciples.

⁵¹ *T. Levi* 10:3 states, "And you will act lawlessly in Israel, with the result that Jerusalem cannot bear the presence of your wickedness, but the curtain of the temple will be torn so that it will no longer conceal your shameful behaviour." It is possible, though, that this passage reflects a Christian alteration of the text; see Howard Clark Kee, "The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Vol. 1; ed. James H. Charlesworth; Garden City: Doubleday, 1983) 792.

⁵² A similar theological construct is made by Hebrews.