

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE SECOND TEMPLE AND THE COMPOSITION OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL

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The quest for the most plausible historical setting surrounding the composition of the Fourth Gospel has had a colorful history in Johannine scholarship. Traditionally, it was thought that the Apostle John, at the urging of some of his disciples, put pen to papyrus and recorded his personal reminiscences of the life and times of Jesus' earthly ministry toward the end of the first century A.D. (Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3.1.2). The geographical framework for such a setting was centered around Ephesus in Asia Minor, a location that also features prominently in the ministry of the Apostle Paul and receives mention in the Letters to the Seven Churches in Revelation 2-3. John, the son of Zebedee, one of three disciples to make up Jesus' inner circle, is paired with Peter in the early portions of the book of Acts, and was reputed to be one of the pillars of the early church in Galatians 2. It is widely held that he later moved to Ephesus, perhaps just prior to the outbreak of the Jewish War, where he had a fruitful ministry that led to the establishment of several congregations, which eventually were the recipients of the three canonical Johannine epistles. Still later, the same apostle was exiled to the island of Patmos, where he wrote the final book of the NT canon, the book of Revelation.

In this reconstruction, John's gospel occupies a place well within the mainstream of first-century Christianity. The relationship with the other canonical Synoptic Gospels tends to be one of friendly supplementation rather than sharp conflict or discord. The gospel itself reflects not merely "Johannine tradition," whether independent of or indebted to "Synoptic tradition," but eyewitness testimony on the part of one of the key participants in the actual story and history leading to Jesus' crucifixion by the Romans. The eyewitness claims in John's gospel (e.g., 19:35; 21:24) were thought to apply to none other than John, the son of Zebedee himself, rather than being applied to him by a later group or community founded by him or tracing their origin back to him. While John was not the main person pushing forward the Gentile mission of the first-century Christians—this

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privilege was reserved for the Apostle Paul – he was thought to have participated in it, among other locations, in and around Ephesus. Hence both geographically and in terms of being part of the network of early Christian missionaries and congregations, the apostle was viewed as serving personally in a prominent role.

As I have documented elsewhere, the spirit of the Enlightenment with its emphasis on the independent investigation of the biblical documents as “books like any other” led to a variety of different readings of John’s gospel, including views regarding its likely setting. The years from 1790 to 1810 in particular reveal considerable ferment in this regard, with some placing the date of composition well into the second century and others defending the traditional paradigm. Among those holding to a second-century date of composition was Edward Evanson, an English Unitarian, who found John’s gospel to be full of legends (such as the Lazarus account) and attributed authorship to someone familiar with Platonic philosophy.¹ In a somewhat similar vein, the German pastor Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider, writing in Germany in 1820, saw the gospel against the backdrop of the Logos of Philonic Alexandrian philosophy, postulating an Egyptian provenance.² While some, such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, continued to advocate a more traditional approach, others, most notably David Friedrich Strauss, viewed the gospel as mythological, a category picked up and further developed by none other than the towering figure of twentieth-century NT and Johannine scholarship, Rudolf Bultmann.³

Within this (for some) rather unsettling ferment in Johannine scholarship, voices such as B. F. Westcott sought to flesh out more fully some of the conventional notions of the composition of John’s gospel. Writing only a few years after Strauss’s death, Westcott sketched the occasion for writing John’s gospel as follows:

In the last quarter of the first century, the world relatively to the Christian Church was a new world; and St John presents in his view of the work and Person of Christ the answers which he had found to be given in Him to the problems which were offered by the changed order. The overthrow of Jerusalem, carrying with it the

¹Edward Evanson, *The Dissonance of the Four Generally Received Evangelists and the Evidence of Their Authenticity Examined* (Ipswich, 1792), cited in Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Early Doubts of the Apostolic Authorship of the Fourth Gospel in the History of Modern Biblical Criticism,” in *Studies on John and Gender: A Decade of Scholarship* (Studies in Biblical Literature 38; New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 25-29.

²Karl Gottlieb Bretschneider, *Probabilia de evangelii et epistolarum Joannis, apostoli, indole et origine eruditorum judicii modest subjecit* (Leipzig: A. Barth, 1820), cited in William Baird, *History of New Testament Research: From Deism to Tübingen* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 312-14.

³For Strauss, Jesus was “a man like others, and the Gospels . . . the oldest collections of the myths which were attached around the core of this personality” (*The Christ of Faith and the Jesus of History: A Critique of Schleiermacher’s Life of Jesus* [trans. and ed. Leander E. Keck; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977], 161 [original date of publication: 1835], cited in Baird, *History of New Testament Research*, 250).

destruction of the ancient service and the ancient people of God, the establishment of the Gentile congregations on the basis of St Paul's interpretation of the Gospel, the rise of a Christian philosophy (*gnōsis*) from the contact of the historic creed with Eastern and Western speculation, could not but lead one who had lived with Christ to go back once more to those days of a divine discipleship, that he might find in them, according to the promise, the anticipated replies to the questionings of a later age.⁴

Contrasting John and the Synoptics, Westcott located the time of composition of the Fourth Gospel firmly in the period subsequent to the destruction of the temple:

The Synoptic Gospels are full of warnings of judgment. . . . In St John all is changed. There are no prophecies of the siege of the Holy City . . . the judgment has been wrought. . . . The task of the Evangelist was to unfold the essential causes of the catastrophe, which were significant for all time, and to shew that even through apparent ruin and failure the will of God found fulfillment. Inexorable facts had revealed the rejection of the Jews. It remained to shew that this rejection was not only foreseen, but was also morally inevitable, and that it involved no fatal loss. . . . The true people of God survived the ruin of the Jews: the ordinances of a new society replaced in a nobler shape the typical and transitory worship of Israel.⁵

Clearly, as far as their postulated setting of John's gospel and their evaluation of its historical value is concerned, Strauss and Westcott inhabit different orbits altogether. While Strauss assigns the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel to the category of religious myth, Westcott locates the composition of the gospel historically within the matrix of three major, then-recent, phenomena: the (Pauline) Gentile mission; the destruction of the temple; and the emergence of Gnosticism. He found in the Fourth Gospel, especially when comparing it to the Synoptics, theological constructs that could best be viewed in response to these developments. While not claiming that this was explicitly spelled out in the text of the gospel, he defended this thesis as a set of eminently plausible historical inferences from the gospel's theology in relation to what is known about the historical setting of the last few decades of the first century. While much subsequent continental Johannine scholarship in the early twentieth century followed Strauss rather than Westcott (most notably the aforementioned Rudolf Bultmann in his celebrated 1941 John commentary), this member of the famed "Cambridge trio"

⁴B. F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975 [1881]), xxxvii-xxxviii.

⁵*Ibid.*, xxxviii (cf. Peter W. L. Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City: New Testament Perspectives on Jerusalem* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996], 197 n. 142, citing Westcott). The above references to Westcott should in no way be read as endorsing any lingering anti-Semitism, anti-Judaism, or supersessionism.

has served as an important point of reference for more conservative scholars ever since who have contended that Westcott's evidence has frequently been disputed but never been successfully refuted.

In the second half of the twentieth century, a rather novel construal of the setting of the Fourth Gospel emerged, the "Johannine community hypotheses" in its various forms and refinements. One very influential proponent of such a hypothesis, the American scholar J. Louis Martyn, used the reference to synagogue expulsion in John 9:22 as his entry point to the gospel's historical setting.⁶ Martyn found in this reference an (anachronistic) pointer to the gospel's life setting, namely, that of the recent excommunication of the Johannine Christians from their parent synagogue at the end of the first century A.D. Hence, according to Martyn, the gospel is foremost, not an account of Jesus' earthly ministry, but of the history of the "Johannine community." This community, according to Martyn, wrote the gospel as an account of its struggle with the Jewish parent synagogue that had expelled it owing to its belief in Jesus as Messiah. Therefore the surface language of the gospel must be decoded by the discerning reader by employing a "two-level hermeneutic" which substitutes symbolic or allegorical references to the "Johannine community" for language overtly pertaining to the historical Jesus. An important historical datum for Martyn's full-fledged version of the "Johannine community hypothesis" (though not the initial version)⁷ was the "curse of the Christians" (*birkat-ha-minim*) which allegedly was added to Jewish synagogue liturgy around A.D. 90 and applied to messianic, Christian Jews.

Others, however, such as Martyn's colleague at Union Seminary, Raymond Brown, managed to hold to a form of "Johannine community" hypothesis without as much as mentioning the *birkat-ha-minim*, which shows that the latter are not an indispensable part of such a construal of the life setting of John's gospel.⁸ While taking a more traditional view in his magisterial Anchor Bible commentary (published in 1966 and 1970 respectively),⁹ Brown postulated a five-

⁶J. Louis Martyn, *History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968; rev. ed., Nashville: Abingdon, 1979); idem, "Glimpses into the History of the Johannine Community," in *L'Évangile de Jean: Sources, Rédaction, Théologie* (BETL 44; ed. M. de Jonge; Leuven: University Press, 1977), 149-75.

⁷Cf. D. M. Smith's response to Robert Kysar at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Toronto, Ontario, November 2002, where Smith astutely observes that Martyn's 1957 Th.D. dissertation, "The Salvation-Historical Perspective in the Fourth Gospel," while displaying seeds of his two-level hermeneutic, contains no references to the *birkat-ha-minim*.

⁸Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple* (New York: Paulist, 1979). See also Gary M. Burge, "Situating John's Gospel in History," in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition* (ed. Robert T. Fortna and Tom Thatcher; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 39.

⁹In a presentation at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Toronto, Ontario, in November 2002, Robert Kysar noted that in his 1966 preface Raymond Brown called the "Johannine community" theory as nothing but a "working

stage trajectory of development of the "Johannine community" which he inferred from the gospel's internal evidence.¹⁰ It must be pointed out, however, that quite a few versions of this type of hypothesis practice an essentially sectarian reading of the gospel which seems to falter in light of the manifest mission motif of this document (see, e.g., 3:16; 17:18; 20:21).¹¹ For this reason efforts were made to refine the hypothesis so as to accommodate this mission emphasis. Perhaps, it was conjectured, some elements within the "Johannine community" (which had been traumatized by being expelled from its parent synagogue) were ready to reach out to their persecutors once again, exhorting more sectarian elements among them to embrace a more missionary outlook.¹²

In any case, the alleged role of the *birkat-ha-minim* in the composition of the Fourth Gospel has undergone extensive critique and reevaluation. S. Motyer, in an important monograph, helpfully summarizes the drastic turning of the tide in the post-Martyn years:

- In 1975 Schäfer argued that the *birkat-ha-minim* played no significant role in the separation of Jews and Christians in the first century.
- In 1981 Schiffman and Kimelman contended that post-70 A.D. Judaism did not close ranks against Jewish Christians and that there is no evidence that the *birkat-ha-minim* were addressed toward them in particular.
- In 1982 Cohen wrote an essay to the effect that the Yavneh sages had a remarkably *inclusive* spirit, cursing only those unwilling to commit to ideological pluralism.
- The same year saw the publication of Horbury's influential study on the textual development of the Twelfth Benediction demonstrating the insecure textual foundation of the Martyn view.
- In 1983 Neusner showed that the Yavneh sage Eliezer ben Hyrcanus displayed a remarkably irenic spirit toward other groups within Judaism, even toward Samaritans.

hypothesis." As Kysar wistfully remarked, however, working hypotheses do not always work!

¹⁰Raymond E. Brown, "'Other Sheep Not of This Fold': The Johannine Perspective on Christian Diversity in the Late First Century," *JBL* 97 (1978): 5-22; see also Wayne A. Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," *JBL* 91 (1972): 44-72.

¹¹For a treatment of the Johannine mission theme, see esp. Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), including a discussion of the state of research and further bibliography.

¹²See the discussion of the contributions of Takashi Onuki, *Gemeinde und Welt im Johannesevangelium* (WMANT 56; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1984); David Rensberger, *Johannine Faith and Liberating Community* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1988); idem, *Overcoming the World: Politics and Community in the Gospel of John* (London: SPCK, 1988); Teresa Okure, *The Johannine Approach to Mission* (WUNT 2/31; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1988); and others in Köstenberger, *Missions of Jesus and the Disciples*, 203-6.

- In 1984 Katz strongly opposed the view that Yavneh launched an official attack on Jewish Christians.
- In 1985 Meeks declared (later echoed by Stanton, 1992) that the *birkat-ha-minim* constitute a "red herring in Johannine research."¹³

More recently, Alexander has maintained that the existence of the *birkat-ha-minim* can be traced back "with some confidence to the first half of the second [but not necessarily the first] century C.E."¹⁴ According to Alexander, labeling someone as a *min* identified that person, not necessarily as a Christian, but as one who did not accept the authority of the rabbis, who in effect condemned all those who were not of their party, "setting themselves up as the custodians of orthodoxy." The curses, rather than singling out messianic Christians, were introduced to "establish Rabbinism as orthodoxy within the synagogue."¹⁵ What is more, Yavneh was in no position to force the *birkat-ha-minim* on the synagogues of Palestine, "let alone of the Diaspora," so that acceptance of these as standard doubtless "would have taken some time."¹⁶ According to Alexander, the exclusion of Christians thus was not the primary, immediate target. "The Rabbis adopted a more subtle ploy: they appear to have set out

¹³See Peter Schäfer, "Die sogenannte Synode von Jabne. Zur Trennung von Juden und Christen im ersten/zweiten Jh. n. Chr.," *Jud* 31 (1975): 54-64, 116-24; Lawrence H. Schiffman, "At the Crossroads: Tannaic Perspectives on the Jewish-Christian Schism," in *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition: Aspects of Judaism in the Graeco-Roman Period* (ed. E. P. Sanders; London: SCM, 1981), 115-56; Reuven Kimelman, "Birkat Ha-Minim and the Lack of Evidence for an Anti-Christian Jewish Prayer in Late Antiquity," in *ibid.*, 226-44; Shaye J. D. Cohen, "Yavneh Revisited: Pharisees, Rabbis, and the End of Jewish Sectarianism" (SBLASP; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982), 45-61, esp. 59; William Horbury, "The Benediction of the *Minim* and Early Jewish-Christian Controversy," *JTS* 33 (1982): 19-61; Jacob Neusner, "The Formation of Rabbinic Judaism: Methodological Issues and Substantive Theses," in *Formative Judaism: Religious, Historical and Literary Studies, Third Series: Torah, Pharisees, and Rabbis* (BJS 46; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1983), 99-144, esp. 133; Steven T. Katz, "Issues in the Separation of Judaism and Christianity after 70 C.E.: A Reconsideration," *JBL* 103 (1984): 43-76; Wayne A. Meeks, "Breaking Away: Three New Testament Pictures of Christianity's Separation from the Jewish Communities," in "To See Ourselves as Others See Us": *Christians, Jews, "Others" in Late Antiquity* (Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1985), 93-115, esp. 102; Graham N. Stanton, *A Gospel for a New People: Studies in Matthew* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), esp. 142. Cited in Stephen Motyer, *Your Father the Devil? A New Approach to John and 'the Jews'* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997), 92-93 nn. 62-69.

¹⁴Philip S. Alexander, "'The Parting of the Ways' from the Perspective of Rabbinic Judaism," in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1992), 7. Alexander refers to Justin's *Dialogue* 16.96 as "perhaps the earliest securely dated evidence for its use" (after A.D. 135).

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 10. The sort of statement that "[t]he degree to which the Pharisees emerge in the fourth Gospel as the dominant force in Judaism . . . is surely best explained as a reflection of the growing dominance of the rabbinic authorities within Judaism during the Jabnean period" seems therefore overconfident. Cf. James D. G. Dunn, "Let John Be John: A Gospel for Its Time," in *The Gospel and the Gospels* (ed. Peter Stuhlmacher; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 303-4.

first and foremost to establish Rabbinism as orthodoxy, knowing that once that happened the exclusion of the Christians from the synagogue would inevitably follow."¹⁷

Alexander's view not only raises serious questions as to whether or not the *birkat-ha-minim* were targeted against Christians, it also casts doubt concerning the date at which these curses were introduced into the synagogue liturgy. For this reason, scholars in recent years have been far less confident than Martyn in postulating that the *birkat-ha-minim* served as the major historical datum underlying the Fourth Gospel.¹⁸ Removing the *birkat-ha-minim*, of course, does not necessarily invalidate all versions of the "Johannine community hypothesis" (though it does cast doubt on Martyn's variety). It does, however, leave a certain historical vacuum in such reconstructions that opens the door for looking in alternative directions.¹⁹ In fact, as R. Bauckham has recently argued, perhaps the proliferation of "community hypotheses," Johannine and otherwise, is overdue for a thorough, even radical, reassessment.²⁰ This is not the place to provide a full-fledged critique of "Johannine community hypotheses" as such. Suffice it to say that the recent decade has seen a remarkable shift away from this paradigm that as recently as in 1990 could be labeled as "virtually established" without fear of contradiction.²¹ Serious doubts have been raised, not so much from

¹⁷Alexander, "Parting of the Ways," 11.

¹⁸This is brushed aside by Dunn, "Let John be John," 304. See also Andreas J. Köstenberger, "John," in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*, Vol. 2 (ed. Clinton E. Arnold; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 95, who lists the following concerns: (1) the uncertainty whether or not the twelfth of the Eighteen Benedictions included the term *nosrim*; (2) the question of whether or not this term designated "Christians"; (3) the issue of whether a church-synagogue conflict around A.D. 90 was the exclusive or primary factor behind John's references to synagogue expulsion; and (4) the charge that references to synagogue expulsion in John's gospel are necessarily anachronistic.

¹⁹This is recognized by Burge, "Situating John's Gospel," who has "no complaint with the notion that a Johannine Community existed and that the concerns of this community inspired the construction and shape of the Fourth Gospel," but who demurs from the contention that such community concerns necessarily led to a severing of historical ties between the gospel and the time of Jesus' earthly ministry (p. 37). While Burge repeatedly asserts that the first stratum of the gospel is to be located well before the First Jewish War (pre-A.D. 66; e.g., p. 44), he does not assign a date to his "Stratum Two," the stage at which (according to Burge) John 1:19 to 20:31 was "put in written form as a single story" (ibid.). In order to evaluate Burge's proposal, however, it would be critical to know the extent to which he allows for the material in the gospel to have been shaped by the events following the destruction of the Second temple in A.D. 70. Also, it is unclear how the second stratum of Burge's essay can be accommodated within the notion of editorial "seams" which Burge postulates elsewhere (see idem, "Interpreting the Gospel of John," in *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues* [ed. David Alan Black and David S. Dockery; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001], 376-80; idem, *Interpreting the Gospel of John* [Guides to New Testament Exegesis; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992], 62-66).

²⁰Note Burge's appropriation of Bauckham's work in "Situating John's Gospel," 41.

²¹Cf. D. Moody Smith, "The Contribution of J. Louis Martyn to the Understanding of the Gospel of John," in *The Conversation Continues: Studies in Paul*

rank-and-file followers of the above-mentioned major protagonists, but by some of the world's leading biblical historians who point to the lack of historical evidence for the existence of such a community in patristic literature and charge that sectarian readings of the Fourth Gospel neglect the demonstrable interconnectedness of the early Christian communities.²²

What is more, in a stunning "confession" at a recent session of the Johannine literature section convened under the auspices of the Society of Biblical Literature, Robert Kysar, whose encyclopedic knowledge of the scholarly literature on John's gospel is widely recognized and respected, chronicled the rise and fall of the Martyn/Brown-style "Johannine community hypothesis" and expressed personal regret for ever having endorsed it.²³ While himself opting for a postmodern paradigm which acknowledges the validity of a variety of "readings" of the Fourth Gospel, Kysar's critique has opened the way for a radical reassessment of a paradigm that until recently was almost beyond question. While O'Day (in a response at that same meeting) is doubtless right in her contention that the abandonment of the apostolic authorship of the Fourth Gospel has "created space" for new readings of the gospel, it is less certain whether the paradigm that, until recently, had replaced the conventional one is a substantial improvement. Once again, it seems, it is time to go back to the drawing board and to reassess what is the most plausible reconstruction of the historical setting surrounding the composition of the Fourth Gospel in light of the history of Johannine scholarship and recent work on the world of the first century A.D.²⁴

and John. In *Honor of J. Louis Martyn* (ed. Robert T. Fortna and Beverly R. Gaventa; Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 293 n. 30: "Martyn's thesis has become a paradigm, to borrow from Thomas Kuhn. It is a part of what students imbibe from standard works, such as commentaries and textbooks, as knowledge generally received and held to be valid."

²²See Martin Hengel, *Die johanneische Frage: Ein Lösungsversuch* (WUNT 67; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1993), on which see my review in *JETS* 39 (1996): 154-55; and Richard Bauckham, *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). This is not to say that on almost any reading there is some kind of community theory that needs to be adopted (whether or not this is the best locution). After all, there is not only a gospel but three epistles and an apocalypse that share remarkable commonalities of style and outlook despite the differences in genre. The Johannine epistles, in particular, clearly presuppose Johannine congregations that were the result of a prolonged, fruitful ministry in a certain locale not dissimilar to Paul's. In no way does skepticism regarding the weak and subjective redaction criticism underlying many forms of the "Johannine community hypothesis" mean that the Johannine corpus is to be treated as cut off from concrete churches.

²³Kysar, who almost thirty years prior to this address had gone on record saying the "Johannine community hypothesis" was a "lasting contribution to end-of-twentieth-century scholarship," discusses the rise and demise of the theory in the following five stages: (1) roots; (2) first signs of flaws; (3) further erosion of confidence; (4) more outspoken criticism; and (5) the theory in a new age.

²⁴In addition to the sources cited above, see also the seminal recent work by Charles E. Hill, *The Johannine Corpus in the Early Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), in which the author takes aim at what he calls the "orthodox

In the following essay, I will endeavor to take another look at one of the three historical data mentioned by Westcott, the destruction of the second temple by the Romans in A.D. 70.²⁵ Without seeking to reduce the historical setting surrounding the composition of the Fourth Gospel exclusively to the aftermath of this important event, it seems that shining the spotlight on the temple's destruction in connection with the writing of John's gospel is justified for several reasons.²⁶ First, while the "Johannine community hypothesis" in its various permutations has witnessed a considerable decline in recent years, one can diagnose, for good reason I believe, a comparable rise

Johannophobia paradigm," that is, the notion that John's gospel was avoided by orthodox second-century Christians owing to its popularity among heterodox groups such as the Gnostics. According to this thesis, it was not until Irenaeus used the Fourth Gospel to refute the heretics that John's status in the canon was assured. As Hill persuasively shows, however, this paradigm, although widely held, lacks adequate support in the available sources. Hill's analysis of primary sources, both heterodox and orthodox, makes clear that the extent of the use of John's gospel among the orthodox has been underestimated and its reception among the Gnostics misunderstood. Hence the "orthodox Johannophobia paradigm" lacks historical credibility and is largely a scholarly myth. One important implication of Hill's rehabilitation of John's gospel is that its alleged non-use in the first half of the second century can no longer be legitimately used as an argument against its apostolic authorship. Rather, "[t]he surprisingly wide and authoritative use of the Fourth Gospel in particular, and of the Apocalypse and the First Epistle secondarily, and their habitual attribution to a common apostolic origin, point to a very early and seemingly instinctive recognition of authority which befits some authoritative source" (p. 475). Henceforth, "[a]ssessments of the 'Johannine school' and its history, and treatments of the rise of a New Testament canon, should recognize what looks like a mostly shared history of the use and reception of the books of the Johannine corpus in the second century" (p. 475).

²⁵I have hinted at this possibility in my *Encountering John: The Gospel in Historical, Literary, and Theological Perspective* (Encountering Biblical Studies; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 25, 28, and in the entry "John," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (ed. Desmond Alexander and Brian Rosner; Leicester: InterVarsity, 2000), 280 = "Introduction to John's Gospel," in *Studies in John and Gender: A Decade of Scholarship* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 7-8. On the history and significance of the temple in Jewish history see Paul M. Hoskins, "Jesus as the Replacement of the Temple in the Gospel of John" (Ph.D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2002), 48-156; on the tabernacle in the OT and Second Temple literature see Craig R. Koester, *The Dwelling of God: The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, Intertestamental Jewish Literature, and the New Testament* (CBQMS 22; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1989), 6-75.

²⁶Cf. esp. Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City*, 195, who contends that the evangelist "was almost certainly writing after AD 70, probably from somewhere in the Diaspora," and that "John and his readers would then be well aware that, since the events recorded in the Gospel, the great city of Jerusalem had fallen to the Romans; above all, the Temple was no more." Walker notes that, "if Jerusalem had recently been overthrown, this would give to John and his readers a shared piece of knowledge in light of which they would understand the text" (p. 195). Earlier, see the brief but suggestive comments by Gale A. Yee, *Jewish Feasts and The Gospel of John* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1989), esp. 12-13 and 16-17. Even more pronounced in its agreement with the thesis of the present essay is Alan R. Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus' Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John* (JSNTSS 220; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002).

in treatments of the temple in relation to Johannine theology.²⁷ Second, unlike the *birkat-ha-minim*, the destruction of the second temple in A.D. 70 is a secure, indisputable historical datum, and one that is clearly recent from the vantage point of a composition of the Fourth Gospel in the 80s or early 90s A.D., which is when John's gospel is widely held to be written.²⁸ Third, as recent scholarship demonstrates, the destruction of the second temple exerted a universal impact on Jews in both Palestine and the Diaspora, owing to the temple's status as a national religious symbol.²⁹ This is clearly relevant for research on John's gospel, a document that very possibly originated in and was directed to a Jewish Diaspora context (such as Diaspora Jews and proselytes in end-of-first-century Ephesus).³⁰

²⁷See, e.g., Motyer, *Your Father the Devil*; Kerr, *Temple of Jesus' Body*; and Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells With Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2001).

²⁸See, e.g., David A. Croteau, "An Analysis of the Arguments for the Dating of the Fourth Gospel," *Faith & Mission* 20/3 (2003): 47-80; and Folker Siegert, "'Zerstört diesen Tempel . . . !' Jesus als 'Tempel' in den Passionüberlieferungen," in *Zerstörungen des Jerusalemer Tempels: Geschehen – Wahrnehmung – Bewältigung* (ed. Johannes Hahn; WUNT 147; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 2002), 118 n. 20. One of the few exceptions is John A. T. Robinson, "The New Look on the Fourth Gospel," (*SE*; ed. Kurt Aland et al.; Berlin: Akademie, 1959), 342; followed by George Allen Turner, "The Date and Purpose of the Gospel by John," *Bulletin of the ETS* 6/2 (May 1963): 82-85. See also Daniel Wallace, "John 5,2 and the Date of the Fourth Gospel," *Bib* 71 (1990): 177-205, esp. 204, and *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 531, who rests his argument for a pre-A.D. 70 date of John's gospel primarily on the use of the present tense in 5:2. But see the critique of Wallace's view in Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Gospel of John* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 178 n. 12; see also Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2002), 43; D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 241; and Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971), 240 n. 4. A very recent contribution is Paul Barnett ("Indications of Earliness in the Gospel of John," *RTR* 64/2 [2005]: 61-75), who argues for a pre-70 A.D. date based on John's historical precision, implied closeness to Jesus, implied exclusive mission to Jews in Palestine, and an implied connection with early mission in Acts. However, none of the implications for an early date Barnett finds in John's gospel is compelling. Contrary to Barnett, the case for a post-70 A.D. date for John's gospel does not primarily rest on John's dependence on the Synoptics nor on the "Johannine community hypothesis." In light of both internal evidence (such as the reference to Peter's martyrdom in 21:18-19) and external attestation (such as Clement's statement that "John, last of all, . . . composed a spiritual Gospel" [Eusebius, *H.E.* 6.14.7]), as well as in light of the Johannine theology of Jesus as the replacement of the temple (which seems to presuppose the temple's destruction), a date in the 80s or early 90s A.D. continues to be most likely. Contra Barnett, with regard to mission, John seems to reflect a period in which gospel proclamation had become universal; there is no reference to the Sadducees, who had faded from view after 70 A.D.; and the Sea of Galilee is referred to by its end-of-first-century name, Sea of Tiberias, in 6:1 and 21:1.

²⁹See, e.g., Jacob Neusner, "Judaism in a Time of Crisis: Four Responses to the Destruction of the Second Temple," *Judaism* 21 (1972): 313: "The destruction of the Second Temple marked a major turning in the history of Judaism in late antiquity. . . . The loss of the building itself was of considerable consequence . . . the devastation of Jerusalem . . . intensified the perplexity of the day The cultic altar, the Temple and the holy city, by August, 70, lay in ruins – a considerable calamity."

³⁰Cf. esp. Carson, *Gospel According to John*, passim.

Finally, fourth, a link between the destruction of the temple and the Fourth Gospel's composition (and in particular its Christology) would be in keeping with the experience of the loss of previous sanctuaries by God's people and with messianic expectations centered on God coming and manifesting his presence more fully in the person of the Messiah. *As will be shown, the Fourth Gospel's emphasis on Jesus as the fulfillment 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.* If this sketch is essentially correct, at least in its general contours, 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. It remains to set forth, first the historical, and then the internal evidence supporting such a reading of John's gospel.

*I. THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE AS A PLAUSIBLE
SETTING FOR THE COMPOSITION OF THE FOURTH GOSPEL*

The destruction of the second temple is an indisputable datum recent from the vantage point of the writing of the Fourth Gospel. The temple's destruction had a universal impact on Jews in Palestine and the Diaspora. It evoked a variety of coping strategies among Jews that the author of John's gospel might have sought to address. Moreover, the destruction of the temple related to messianic expectations that would have allowed John to present Jesus as the fulfillment of temple-related messianic symbolism and predictions.

*A. An Indisputable Historical Datum Recent
From the Vantage Point of the Writing of the Fourth Gospel*

The destruction of the second temple by the Romans in A.D. 70 is an indisputable historical datum. If in fact John's gospel was written in the 80s or early 90s A.D., as is widely held, it would be hardly conceivable in light of the commonly acknowledged universal effect of this event on Jews in both Palestine and the Diaspora that the temple's destruction did not figure significantly as part of the matrix underlying the writing of John's gospel. While it must be frankly acknowledged that the destruction of the temple is not explicitly mentioned in John's gospel, the fact remains that John is a rather subtle 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 certain incidents.³¹ On balance, therefore, the lack of direct reference to the destruction of the temple in John's gospel ought to be taken neither as evidence that it had not yet occurred nor as evidence that it had. Regarding other NT books, a good case can be made that both the Synoptics and the book of Hebrews—neither of which mention the destruction of the temple—were written prior to A.D. 70. What is more, the book of Hebrews features a replacement theme similar to John's gospel. The Fourth Gospel's replacement theme is therefore inadequate by itself to warrant the inference that the gospel was written after A.D. 70; this must be determined by a combination of factors. Nevertheless, if the Fourth Gospel was in fact written subsequent to A.D. 70, which is indisputably when the Second temple was destroyed, it is highly plausible that this event had at least some bearing on the way this gospel was written, unless, of course, one adopts a radical, sectarian reading of the gospel. This, in turn, is however rendered highly doubtful by the gospel's pervasive emphasis on mission as well as recent research indicating the interconnectedness of early Christian communities in the first century A.D.

B. The Universal Impact of the Destruction of the Temple on Jews in Palestine and the Diaspora

A second important reason why the destruction of the temple is a historical datum of likely significance for the composition of the Fourth Gospel is its universal impact on Jews in both Palestine and the Diaspora.³² In an important essay, Alexander notes that "the War of 66-74 destroyed whatever existed of a centralized religious authority within Judaism."³³ According to Alexander, the events surrounding the destruction of the temple were significant in at least two important respects: first, "the debacle of the War" opened for (Jewish) Christians a "window of opportunity," sweeping away the authorities hostile to emergent Christianity and removing for the foreseeable future the threat of "being excommunicated from Israel by decree from [*sic*] Jerusalem." Moreover, "[t]he destruction of the Temple also handed the Christians a propaganda coup, for it gave them the chance to argue that the catastrophe was a divine judgement on Israel for the rejection of Jesus."³⁴

³¹See esp. Kerr, *Temple of Jesus' Body*, 24, who, in response to J. A. T. Robinson, contends that the very "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, in the interests of shrewdly presenting Jesus as the new Temple complex of Judaism."

³²See Stefan Lücking, "Die Zerstörung des Tempels 70 n. Chr. als Krisenerfahrung der frühen Christen," in *Zerstörungen des Jerusalemer Tempels*, esp. 144-46, who relates the temple's destruction to the life setting of Mark's gospel.

³³Alexander, "Parting of the Ways," 3.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 20. According to the Synoptics, this was already what Jesus himself had predicted (Matt 24:2 par.; cf. Luke 23:28-31).

By stressing the spiritual nature of the kingdom and de-emphasizing "the territorial dimension of Judaism," however, Christians proved out of step with rabbinic Judaism.³⁵ Paradoxically, the success of the Gentile mission, too, created an "image problem" in that "Christianity must have found it increasingly difficult to establish itself in the eyes of Jews as a *Jewish* movement."³⁶ Nevertheless, Alexander believes it is reasonable to assume that "the Jewish Christians never abandoned their mission to Israel."³⁷ Fascinatingly, he sketches the position of Jewish Christianity as "caught between Scylla and Charybdis": "the closer it moved to the Gentile Churches the less credible it would have become within the Jewish community; the more it emphasized its Jewishness the more difficult would have become its relations with the Gentile Churches."³⁸ Increasingly, the drawing apart of rabbinism and Gentile Christianity left "Jewish Christianity exposed and vulnerable between the two camps."³⁹

If Alexander's reconstruction is at least approximately accurate, Jewish-Christian relations at the presumed time of the Fourth Gospel's composition were therefore considerably more fluid than the rigid form of Martyn's *birkat-ha-minim* hypothesis would indicate. Not only did the destruction of the temple not witness a complete rupture of Jewish-Christian relations, this event provided Christians with an opportunity for Jewish mission, a mission that, Alexander is convinced, Jewish Christians (such as John the apostle) never abandoned. The relevance of these insights with regard to the composition and purpose of John's gospel is apparent.

The data provided by Alexander's essay are supplemented by one of the most important recent studies of Diaspora reactions to the destruction of the second temple by M. Goodman.⁴⁰ Goodman contends that there is "every reason to suppose that the razing of the Temple horrified Diaspora Jews as much as their Judaeans compatriots."⁴¹ For the Jewish historian Josephus, living in Rome, "Judaism without the Temple seems to have been unthinkable," at least initially (*Ap.* 2.193-98).⁴² Thus it seems a "fair assumption" that Diaspora Jews likewise "were profoundly affected" by the consequences of the first Jewish War in A.D. 66-70. What is more, it is not unlikely that "the large settlements of Jews in Asia Minor" acted

³⁵Alexander, "Parting of the Ways," 23, with reference to the work of W. D. Davies.

³⁶*Ibid.*

³⁷*Ibid.*, 23 n. 35.

³⁸*Ibid.*, 24.

³⁹*Ibid.*, 24 n. 37.

⁴⁰Martin Goodman, "Diaspora Reactions to the Destruction of the Temple," in *Jews and Christians*, 27-38. For the circumstances surrounding the Jewish revolt of A.D. 66-70, see also the same author's *The Ruling Class of Judaea: The Origins of the Jewish Revolt Against Rome, A.D. 66-70* (Cambridge: University Press, 1987), esp. 176-97.

⁴¹Goodman, "Diaspora Reactions," 27.

⁴²See further below.

as host for some (though probably not many) of those involved in the Judean revolt.⁴³ If so, the destruction of the Jerusalem temple was not merely a distant event of remote relevance for Diaspora Jews, but an earthquake that reverberated powerfully even among those Jews and proselytes who lived dispersed throughout the Graeco-Roman world toward the end of the first century A.D.

In a statement that has relevance for the likely impact of the *birkat-ha-minim* in the Greek-speaking Diaspora where John's gospel in all likelihood was written, Goodman notes that it is very possible "that the rabbis lacked any say in the Greek-speaking diaspora until well into the third century A.D. or even later."⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the destruction of the temple affected people living in the Diaspora in a variety of ways:

- The Romans "trumpeted their victory throughout the empire": "coins proclaimed *Judaea Capta*," and the Temple of Peace was dedicated on the Capitol in A.D. 76.⁴⁵

- The ambiguity inherent in the Latin name *Iudaeus* (Gr. *Ioudaios*)—at first referring to Judeans, the inhabitants of Judea, over whom the Roman victory had been won, but the identical term was also used to refer to Jews wherever they lived—led to reprisals for Jews across the empire.

- A special poll tax (the *fiscus Judaicus*) was imposed on all Jews, a practice tightened up under Domitian (A.D. 81-96), under whom apparently even proselytes and Jewish apostates were subject to taxation (Suetonius, *Dom.* 12.2).⁴⁶ Only under Domitian's successor Nerva (after A.D. 96) was there a clearer line of demarcation drawn between Jews and Christians (cf. Pliny, *Ep.* 10.96).

Not that this was the first time that the Jews were bereft of their central sanctuary. To the contrary, each past instance of the destruction or loss of the temple confronted the Jews with their need to develop a variety of coping strategies. The first such need arose for the exiles in Babylon in the years subsequent to the events of the years 586/587 B.C.⁴⁷ Intriguingly, in that case it was not the emergent synagogue, but the presence of Yahweh himself that served as a

⁴³Goodman, "Diaspora Reactions," 30. On p. 36, Goodman refers to "huge numbers" of Jews in Asia Minor surviving after the Second Jewish revolt in A.D. 135.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 29.

⁴⁵*Ibid.* See also Sabine Panzram, "Der Jerusalemer Tempel und das Rom der Flavier," in *Zerstörungen des Jerusalemer Tempels*, 166-82.

⁴⁶Goodman, "Diaspora Reactions," 32, with reference to L. A. Thompson, "Domitian and the Jewish Tax," *Historia* 31 (1982): 329-42.

⁴⁷See Andreas Ruwe, "Die Veränderung tempeltheologischer Konzepte in Ezechiel 8-11," in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel/Community without Temple: Zur Substituierung und Transformation des Jerusalemer Tempels und seines Kults im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum* (ed. Beate Ego, Armin Lange and Peter Pilhofer; WUNT 118; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1999), 3-18; and Rainer Albertz, "Die Zerstörung des Jerusalemer Tempels 587 v. Chr.: Historische Einordnung und religionspolitische Bedeutung" and Karl-Friedrich Pohlmann, "Religion in der Krise—Krise einer Religion: Die Zerstörung des Jerusalemer Tempels 587 v. Chr.," both in *Zerstörungen des Jerusalemer Tempels*, 23-39 and 40-60.

substitute for the loss of the Jerusalem temple. As Yahweh contends in Ezek 11:16, "for a little while [the time of the exile] I have been a sanctuary for them." Importantly, this reference relativizes the function of the temple and sets it in the larger context of the manifestations of Yahweh's presence to the people of Israel and the relationship he had sustained with his people in the time prior to the building of the Solomonic temple. Significantly, already Solomon himself displayed a clear awareness that God's presence could not be contained in a man-made temple or house of worship (1 Kgs 8:27), an awareness that is later mirrored by the prophet Isaiah (66:1-2). Jeremiah, for his part, makes clear that Israel's disobedience would result in the loss of temple and the land of promise.⁴⁸ Merely saying, "This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!" (7:4) would be utterly futile at a time when God's house had in fact become a "den of robbers" (7:10, cf. 14-15).⁴⁹

Not only did the Jews have to cope with the absence of the temple in exile, many even after the remnant's return remained in the Diaspora and continued to live away and apart from the temple.⁵⁰ What is more, the Second Temple period saw the emergence of rival temples at Elephantine (Upper Egypt), Leontopolis (Lower Egypt), and in Samaria,⁵¹ even though all of these were outside of Judea and none rivaled the position of the Jerusalem sanctuary. Synagogues in Judea, for their part, were given the rather profane name *synagogē* (rather than *proseuchē* as in the Diaspora) in order to avoid any threat to the status of the temple.⁵²

Another "community without a temple" were the Qumran covenanters who withdrew from the Jerusalem temple owing to the corruption of its worship (see esp. 4QMMT; cf. 1QS 9:3-4; CD 6:11-15). Intriguingly, the history of the Qumran sect in fact anticipates the situation faced by post-A.D. 70 Judaism in that the sect had to face the loss of the temple (in their case due to their own choice to withdraw) earlier than Judaism at large. While there is no evidence of sacrificial rites at Qumran, the covenanters viewed themselves as a virtual temple "in which, through purity regulations, prayer and, the study of God's law, it was possible to achieve the spiritual

⁴⁸See Matthias Albani, "Wo sollte ein Haus sein, das ihr mir bauen könntet?" (Jes 66,1), in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel*, 37-56. See also Erich Zenger, "Der Psalter als Heiligtum," in *ibid.*, 115-30, who contends that "the psalter is not particularly interested in the Temple cult but in the Temple as the sphere of YHWH's revelation" and that in quite a few psalms "the Temple functions even as a metaphor of shelter and refuge" (p. 128).

⁴⁹See Armin Lange, "Gebotsobservanz statt Opferkult: Zur Kultpolemik in Jer 7,1-8,3," in *ibid.*, 19-35.

⁵⁰See Ina Willi-Plein, "Warum musste der Zweite Tempel gebaut werden?" in *ibid.*, 57-73.

⁵¹See Jörg Frey, "Temple and Rival Temple—The Cases of Elephantine, Mt. Gerizim, and Leontopolis," in *ibid.*, 171-203.

⁵²*Ibid.*, 197. See also Frowald G. Hüttenmeister, "Die Synagoge: Ihre Entwicklung von einer multifunktionalen Einrichtung zum reinen Kultbau," in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel*, 357-69.

connection with the divine which had been vouchsafed to Israel in God's central sanctuary according to the Bible."⁵³ At the same time, the sect (presumably including former Sadducean priests) cherished the future expectation that in the end times they would be restored to lead sacrificial worship in the Jerusalem temple (see esp. 1QM and 11QT).⁵⁴

A fascinating glimpse of people's ways of coping with the loss of the second temple after its destruction in A.D. 70 is found in Josephus's works *Jewish War* and *Antiquities*.⁵⁵ In the former work, published in A.D. 79—almost ten years after the destruction of the temple—Josephus, in Thucydidean style expressing his own views through the words of his characters, features a speech of Eleazar son of Yair, which contends that there could not be a Judaism without the temple, so that the people in Masada were the final Jews on the earth. By the time of the publication of his *Antiquities* thirteen years later, however, in A.D. 92, Josephus had come to realize that his previous opinion had been mistaken and Judaism could continue to exist without the temple.

Especially in light of the fact that the composition of the Fourth Gospel should in all likelihood be placed in this same period, Josephus's early view and shift of opinion are illustrative. It appears that, for at least certain Jews, life without the temple was at first hardly imaginable. After the initial shock, however, coping mechanisms gradually began to emerge. It may be surmised that, likewise, after the initial shock had waned, Christian apologetic efforts toward Jews (such as John's) were being formulated that sought to address the Jews' need to fill the void left by the second temple's destruction.⁵⁶ Specifically, it appears that the Fourth

⁵³Lawrence H. Schiffman, "Community Without Temple: The Qumran Community's Withdrawal from the Jerusalem Temple," in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel*, 280. On "Prayer in Qumran and the Synagogue," see the essay with this title by Esther Eshel in *ibid.*, 323-34.

⁵⁴See Schiffman, "Community Without Temple"; Hermann Lichtenberger, "Der Mythos von der Unzerstörbarkeit des Tempels," in *Zerstörungen des Jerusalemer Tempels*, 100-101, citing 11QTS 29:7-10; Florentino García Martínez, "Priestly Functions in a Community without Temple," in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel*, 303-19; and George J. Brooke, "Miqdash Adam, Eden, and the Qumran Community," in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel*, 285-301, who notes the importance of the community's eschatological self-understanding in coping with life without a temple. Brooke distinguishes between an earlier period featuring predominantly priestly terms and a later period which stressed the sovereignty of God and messianism. Note also Friedrich Avemarie, who proposes that John the Baptist should be viewed "as an exponent of a type of piety which had become essentially indifferent to the reality of a functioning sacrificial cult" ("Ist die Johannestaufe ein Ausdruck von Tempelkritik? Skizze eines methodischen Problems," 395-410).

⁵⁵See Hanan Eshel, "Josephus' View on Judaism without the Temple in Light of the Discoveries at Masada and Murabba'at," in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel*, 229-38 (cited by Lichtenberger, "Mythos," 106). See also Kerr, *Temple of Jesus' Body*, 45, who notes that Josephus (*War* 2.647-7.455 and *Life* 407-23) is the only source for most of the Jewish War and the destruction of the temple.

⁵⁶Another pertinent document illustrating this period is the book of 4 Ezra, which was written in Hebrew shortly after the death of Domitian ca. A.D. 100 (see

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 fulfillment 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.⁵⁷

C. The Destruction of the Temple, Jewish Post-A.D. 70 Coping Strategies, and John's Gospel

1. The Interface Between the Destruction of the Second Temple and the Composition of John's Gospel

James D. G. Dunn, in his preface to the published Second Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and Judaism (held in 1989) underscores the seminal importance of the time period under consideration when he contends "that the years between apostolic age and post apostolic age, between second Temple Judaism and rabbinic Judaism [A.D. 70-132], . . . are the hinge on which major issues hung and decisive events turned."⁵⁸ One scholar who draws an explicit connection between the destruction of the second temple and the composition of the Fourth Gospel is J. A. Draper, who ventures to suggest 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."⁵⁹

⁵⁷Hermann Lichtenberger, "Zion and the Destruction of the Temple in 4 Ezra 9-10," in *Gemeinde ohne Tempel*, 239-49; see also Manuel Vogel, "Tempel und Tempelkult in Pseudo-Philos *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*," in *ibid.*, 251-63; and Jacob Neusner, "Formation of Rabbinic Judaism," 99-144, esp. 122). Fourth Ezra contains seven visions said to have been received by Ezra in the thirteenth year after the destruction of the first temple in 587 B.C. The author's solution to the loss of the temple is a return to the old Law. As prior to the building of the First temple, this time without the Second temple ought to be characterized by renewed adherence to, and focus on, Torah.

⁵⁷See also the various essays in Hahn, ed., *Zerstörungen des Jerusalemer Tempels*, which focus on the impact the destructions of the temple in 587 B.C. and A.D. 70 had on the identity and self-perception of both Jews and (in the case of A.D. 70) Christians.

⁵⁸James D. G. Dunn, "Preface," in *Jews and Christians*, ix-x. See also *idem*, *The Parting of the Ways Between Christianity and Judaism and Their Significance for the Character of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Trinity International, 1991), 220-29, esp. 221-22.

⁵⁹J. A. Draper, "Temple, Tabernacle and Mystical Experience in John," *Neot* 31/2 (1997): 285. In a basic survey article, Jacob Neusner discerns four responses to the destruction of the temple: (1) apocalyptic writers; (2) the Dead Sea community; (3) the Christian response; and (4) the Pharisees ("Judaism in a Time of Crisis," 313-27).

Draper himself views John's gospel as an "introversionist response" that seeks to "open the way to direct experience of the divine presence in the heavenly realms" by drawing on "existing strands in the Jewish religion."⁶⁰ For Draper, "[T]he repositioning of the temple incident in John's Gospel to the beginning of the narrative is an important clue to its central interest," with the temple serving as a "historical pivot point."⁶¹ Draper believes that the temple's destruction must be seen as "the major turning point in the development of the Jesus movement from a movement for the physical restoration of Israel into something else."⁶² Yet it was not the destruction itself which caused a crisis, but the failure of its swift renewal.⁶³ While one may not agree with all of the details of Draper's reconstruction (particularly his view that the Fourth Gospel constitutes a somewhat mystical "introversionist response" to the temple's destruction), Draper provides a suggestive treatment relating the destruction of the second temple and the composition of the Fourth Gospel that sets the stage for other possible reconstructions.

Another scholar who explores the relationship between the destruction of the temple and the composition of John's gospel is W. D. Davies, who concurs that the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 was an event of utmost significance in the history of Judaism.⁶⁴ In the years subsequent to the temple's destruction, the Pharisaic leaders, by a policy of consolidation and exclusion, sought to fend off both disintegration within Judaism itself and the attraction of outside forces, including paganism, Christianity, and Gnosticism. The Torah became central, and differences between rabbinic schools were minimized, a process that culminated in the codification of the Mishnah in the early third century. The synagogue replaced the temple as a symbol of Jewish unity. According to Davies, the Judaism in John's day was "vigorously adjusting to the new conditions prevailing among Jewry after 70 C.E."⁶⁵ The Johannine label "the Jews" with its equation of Judaism and Pharisaism may reflect post-A.D. 70 conditions.

Especially important for Davies is the notion of "holy space."⁶⁶ In discussing the replacement theme of holy places in John, Davies notes that the "poignance of that emphasis itself must, in turn, be understood in the light of the fall of Jerusalem and the devastation of

⁶⁰Draper, "Temple, Tabernacle and Mystical Experience," 285.

⁶¹Ibid., 263 (with further reference to 4Q174). See also the contribution by Stegemann, on which see further below.

⁶²Draper, "Temple, Tabernacle and Mystical Experience," 264.

⁶³Ibid., with reference to *y. Ber.* 5a.

⁶⁴W. D. Davies, "Reflections on Aspects of the Jewish Background of the Gospel of John," in *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (ed. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 43-64.

⁶⁵Ibid., 51.

⁶⁶Cf. W. D. Davies, *The Gospel and the Land: Early Christianity and Jewish Territorial Doctrine* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1974; repr. 1994), esp. 288-335.

The Land [*sic*] in the revolt against Rome. To point to Jesus the Christ as the replacement of the fallen Temple . . . , as John does at a time when the war against Rome had deprived Jews of their Land and Temple and had desecrated their holy places so that their loss was constantly and painfully present, was to touch a most raw nerve."⁶⁷ Moreover, if R. Alan Culpepper is correct in identifying 1:12 as the pivot of the Johannine prologue (and Davies thinks that he is), Christianity's laying claim on the title "children of God" (abdicated by Jews who had rejected Jesus as the Christ) is central to the gospel.⁶⁸ Being God's people was one of the basic beliefs of Judaism; John redefined this epithet to include anyone who believed in Jesus (cf. 1:12).⁶⁹

Like Draper and Davies, E. Stegemann, too, believes that John's gospel presupposes the temple's destruction (see 4:23-24).⁷⁰ According to Stegemann, the evangelist's portrayal of Jesus as the temple's substitute serves the purpose of distancing Jesus from a political construal of his messianic claims. For John, Jesus is precisely not the "king of the Jews," a messianic signs prophet, or pretender to the throne, but the Son of God and messianic "king of Israel" (1:49; 12:14-16; 20:30-31). Stegemann also notes that the temple clearing pericope establishes a direct connection between the temple's destruction and Jesus' resurrection.⁷¹ The contributions of these scholars, together with the works of Alexander and Goodman mentioned above, further solidify a plausible historical reconstruction behind the composition of the Fourth Gospel in which it is not so much the *birkat-ha-minim* but the destruction of the second temple that functions as an important historical datum with possible ramifications for the composition, the Christology, and the (apologetic) purpose for writing John's gospel.

2. "Letting John Be John" and "Points of Sensitivity" in John's Gospel

James Dunn, in his essay "Let John be John"—by which he means not "to understand John's Christology *too quickly* as an expression of later orthodoxy (or later heresy) or in relation to the

⁶⁷Davies, "Reflections," 56. Davies properly emphasizes the importance of recognizing "the stage at which John penned his Gospel in the development of Christianity in its relationship to Judaism" (*ibid.*, 57).

⁶⁸Cf. R. Alan Culpepper, "The Pivot of John's Prologue," *NTS* 28 (1980-81): 1-31. I essentially concur with Culpepper's view on the structure of John's prologue in my BECNT commentary on John's gospel, *John*, 21.

⁶⁹Davies, "Reflections," 59.

⁷⁰Ekkehard W. Stegemann, "Zur Tempelreinigung im Johannesevangelium," in *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte. Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorff zum 65. Geburtstag* (ed. Erhard Blum et al.; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1990), 503-16.

⁷¹Note that in the present essay I prefer the term "temple clearing" over the more traditional "temple cleansing" (Kerr, *Temple of Jesus' Body*, 79, refers to the "temple cleaning"!).

historical Jesus *per se*⁷²—essentially embraces J. L. Martyn’s reconstruction of the occasion of John’s gospel and uses the Fourth Gospel’s Christology as a window onto post-A.D. 70 Judaism. He contends that apocalyptic and mystical strands survived the first Jewish revolt and may have interfaced with the Fourth Gospel.⁷³ The Johannine Jesus is from above, he is the bringer of divine revelation, and the true Israelite is encouraged to fulfill Israel’s calling (according to popular etymology) to be “the one who sees God.”⁷⁴ For Dunn, the two major poles of Johannine Christology are Jesus’ pre-existence (his heavenly origin, coupled with the descent-ascent motif) and his unity with the Father (termed by Dunn “closeness of continuity”). These, in turn, represent elaborations of the initial identification of Jesus as incarnate Wisdom.⁷⁵ Thus Dunn construes the Fourth Gospel’s Christology as devised “in dialogue with broader strands of apocalyptic and mystical Judaism, with the rabbis of Jabneh, and possibly with other Christians too.”⁷⁶

But is Dunn thereby “letting John be John”? One wonders if Dunn presupposes too advanced a state of Jewish-Christian “dialogue” and thus ends up having the Fourth Evangelist “respond” to developments in rabbinic Judaism that most likely belong to a later stage of development than that prevalent at the time of the Fourth Gospel’s composition. To put it differently: How does one know whether or not rabbinic Judaism was at the particular stage at which Dunn places the composition of John’s gospel? Remarkably, in his essay Dunn omits any reference to the massive replacement theology operative in John’s gospel with regard to Jesus and Jewish festivals and institutions such as the temple. Could it be that it is here that the center of gravity in John’s apologetic and christological approach is found?

Motyer engages in substantive critique of Dunn and particularly Martyn. Regarding the latter, he notes that Martyn “attempts no overview of Judaism in the post-70 period, does not engage at all with the issues surrounding the destruction of the Temple and its aftermath, and leaves many contemporary Jewish sources untouched.”⁷⁷ Motyer charges that Martyn’s engagement of the text of the Fourth Gospel and of Jewish sources is highly selective and notes that, while “[t]he reconstruction has now lost its heart (the

⁷²Dunn, “Let John Be John,” 317. One might add that between these two “extremes” (if this is what they are) there are several possible scenarios, of which Dunn’s is only one. So even if, for the sake of argument, one were to agree with Dunn’s diagnosis of the problem, one need not necessarily agree with him on the solution. Other scenarios are possible, if not more likely. Cf. the critique by Motyer, *Your Father the Devil*, 20.

⁷³Dunn, “Let John Be John,” 306-9.

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, 309-11.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, 314-15.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 317. Dunn presents a similar reconstruction in *Parting of the Ways*, 220-29. I hope to interact with Dunn’s proposal further in my forthcoming contribution *Father, Son, and Spirit: The Trinity and John’s Gospel*.

⁷⁷Motyer, *Your Father the Devil*, 25.

connection with the *birkat ha-minim*),” “it hangs onto life nonetheless.”⁷⁸ Motyer’s own method, following Dunn, is to identify “points of sensitivity” within the Johannine text, “points at which an effort is evidently being made to clarify some confusion or to counter opposing views.”⁷⁹ In a dialectic between text and background, and by way of a controlled “mirror reading,” Motyer hopes to improve on Martyn and Dunn, primarily by being less selective and more holistic in dealing with the first-century evidence.⁸⁰

Motyer’s first “point of sensitivity” is the temple and the festivals. Taking his point of departure from R. Brown, Motyer notes that “Yee is the only recent scholar to explore to any extent the relationship between the Johannine emphasis on the Temple and its worship, and the destruction of the Temple and the cessation of that worship in 70 AD.”⁸¹ Motyer continues, “The extent to which the relevance of these events has been ignored is quite remarkable.”⁸² He conjectures that this neglect may be due in part to the “tunnel-vision” resulting from an exclusive interest in the alleged history of the “Johannine community.”⁸³ Motyer writes,

Whatever the reasons, the fact remains that no full-scale work has yet explored the thesis which seems to arise most naturally from the Johannine concentration on the Temple and its worship—namely, that the “point of sensitivity” here signalled is, *directly*, the trauma resulting from the destruction of the Temple and the cessation of its worship.⁸⁴

Motyer points particularly to Jesus’ words in John 2, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will rebuild it,” together with the entire temple-clearing episode, as an instance that “rang with nuances and connotations fed by the readers’ situation.”⁸⁵ Motyer himself finds that “the reason for the prominence given to this story, and then to the festivals, is the evangelist’s desire to address this trauma.”⁸⁶ “Read within a post-70 situation, there would be no difficulty for any reader, Jew or Christian, in comprehending the claim made for Jesus in 2:21f: his resurrection constitutes a rebuilding of the destroyed temple.”⁸⁷ According to the Fourth Evangelist, Jesus is “the answer to the agonising problem of the post-70 period: how can we re-shape

⁷⁸Ibid., 27, with reference to Mark Stibbe, *John as Storyteller*, 56-58, 61.

⁷⁹Motyer, *Your Father the Devil*, 33, citing Dunn, “Let John Be John,” 318.

⁸⁰Compare the critique of Dunn’s neglect of the destruction of the temple in his analysis above.

⁸¹Cf. Yee, *Jewish Feasts and the Gospel of John*. Motyer adds reference to Walker’s treatment of John in *Jesus and the Holy City*.

⁸²Motyer, *Your Father the Devil*, 37.

⁸³Ibid., 38 n. 12.

⁸⁴Ibid., 38.

⁸⁵Ibid.

⁸⁶Ibid., 39.

⁸⁷Ibid.

our lives without the Temple?"⁸⁸ John 11:47-50 and 4:21-23, too, have powerful implications when read against a post-70 A.D. backdrop. Motyer concludes "that 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."⁸⁹

In a chapter devoted to assessing "Jews and Judaism after the destruction of the Temple," Motyer contends, with Neusner, that the situation was "much more complex and slow-moving" and that it was not until after A.D. 132-35 that "rabbinic orthodoxy" became established.⁹⁰ As Neusner notes, the temple's destruction provoked, not only physical suffering and displacement, but, more importantly, "a profound and far-reaching crisis in [the Jews'] inner and spiritual existence."⁹¹ Similar to the situation prior to the destruction of the Solomonic temple and the Babylonian exile, a presumptuous belief in the invincibility of Jerusalem preceded the disaster (*Sib. Or.* 3:702-13).⁹² This presumption was dealt a severe blow by the events of A.D. 66-74 (viz. 2 Bar. 14:6-7, 17-19; 4 Ezra 3:28-36; 4:23-24; 6:57).⁹³

Following Cohen, Motyer concludes that various Jewish sects defined themselves with reference to the temple. "Its destruction undermined this sectarianism and led to a rise of individualism, in which individual prophetic voices sought to make themselves heard."⁹⁴ For Motyer, the Fourth Gospel is one such voice, "seeking to bring order into the social chaos and disorientation which resulted from the disruption of the pre-70 groupings—just as, in different ways, the Rabbis, the apocalyptists, and the militants also sought to."⁹⁵

⁸⁸Ibid., 41.

⁸⁹Ibid., 73. He interprets the purpose statement in 20:30-31 evangelistically. But see the essay by Goodman on Diaspora reactions to the destruction of the temple above which demonstrates that the effects of this event were by no means limited to Palestine.

⁹⁰Ibid., 75, with reference to Jacob Neusner, "Judaism after the Destruction of the Temple: An Overview," in *Formative Judaism*, 83-98.

⁹¹Neusner, "Formation," 122, cited in Motyer, *Your Father the Devil*, 77.

⁹²See Lichtenberger, "Mythos," 92-107.

⁹³Motyer helpfully summarizes three basic explanations, underlying five responses. The temple's destruction is explained as: (1) God's punishment for Israel's sin (*Apoc. Abr.* 25, 27; *Sib. Or.* 4; 2 Bar. 10:18; 4 Ezra 7:72); (2) the work of the devil (*Sib. Or.* 5); and (3) the plan and will of God (4 Ezra 4:10-11; 2 and 4 Baruch). Five responses (not necessarily mutually exclusive) are: (1) rejection of the cult (*Sib. Or.* 4:9; *T. Abr.* 12:13-18); (2) renewed emphasis on Torah (2 Bar. 46:4-5; 77:3-6; 4 Ezra; *b. Ket.* 66b); (3) resurgence of mysticism and apocalypticism; (4) quietist eschatology (2 Baruch; 4 Baruch; *Sib. Or.* 5); and (5) activist eschatology and popular messianism (*Apoc. Abr.*). Compare Kerr, *The Temple of Jesus' Body*, 50-53, who cites two explanations—chastisement for sin (e.g. *Sib. Or.* 4; 2 Bar.) and the plan and will of God (2 and 4 Bar.; 4 Ezra)—and several responses, including renewed emphasis on Torah piety; Merkabah mysticism and apocalypticism; and quietist or activist eschatology. Kerr categorizes John's response under the rubric of quietist eschatology (pp. 60-62).

⁹⁴Motyer, *Your Father the Devil*, 103.

⁹⁵Ibid.

Rather than reflecting “a situation in which all contact between Jews and Christians had been severed”—as Martyn and his followers contend—John’s gospel seeks to speak “a message of hope and salvation.”⁹⁶

D. The Destruction of the Temple and Jewish Messianic Expectations

While exilic and post-exilic prophecy did conjure up the notion of an eschatological, renewed sanctuary (see esp. Ezekiel 40-48), an important strand in biblical prophecy spoke of God visiting his people directly in the person of the Messiah, the son of David (e.g., Ezekiel 34). Just as the entire OT sacrificial and priestly system is understood in the book of Hebrews as typologically anticipating the permanent high priesthood and once-for-all atoning sacrifice of Christ, one may therefore reasonably find the physical structures associated with the worship of God, be it the tabernacle or the original or restored Solomonic temple, as foreshadowing a time when God himself would come to his people in a way that superseded and permanently replaced the local and temporary structures facilitating such worship. As will be shown below, references in John’s gospel—such as 1:14, where, in allusion to the OT tabernacle, it is said that Jesus “pitched his tent” among God’s people, or 2:21, 23, where Jesus is quoted as saying that, “a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem” and that “a time is coming *and has now come* when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth”—clearly bear this out.

To this, of course, should be added God’s promises that he would dwell among his people in a new temple (e.g., Zech 2:10; Ezek 37:27; 43:7, 9).⁹⁷ Also relevant are prophetic notions of a new covenant, as part of which God would teach his people more directly and which would find the Spirit poured out on all of God’s people, making it possible for God’s commandments not merely to be written on stone tablets but on people’s very hearts. In the context of previous destructions of the Jerusalem sanctuary, and of messianic expectations envisioning God’s dwelling with his people apart from the temple in a more direct and immediate way, it is therefore

⁹⁶Ibid., 103-4. To this may be added the recent contribution of Alan Kerr, *Temple of Jesus’ Body*, who defends a post-A.D. 70 date for the gospel (pp. 19-25) and provides an effective critique of J. A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1979), esp. 275-76, who argues that “there is nothing [in John] that suggests or presupposes that the temple is already destroyed or that Jerusalem is in ruins” (p. 275). Kerr contends that John’s gospel was written in the aftermath of the destruction of the temple in order to provide the (Johannine) Christian answer to the question, “What now?” According to Kerr, the answer is essentially christological: Jesus, as the new temple, has both fulfilled and replaced the old sanctuary.

⁹⁷Hoskins, “Jesus as the Replacement of the Temple,” 172, draws attention to the verbal parallel to John 1:14b in Zech 2:14 LXX: *kataskênōsō en mesō(i)*. Hoskins also cites Joel 3:17 and Zech 8:3. See further the discussion of John 1:14 below.

plausible to see the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 as occasioning John to think of Jesus in terms which present him as the permanent solution to the Jews' experience of the loss of the Jerusalem sanctuary. Very possibly, John may have seized on the crisis of belief resulting from the destruction of the second temple and formulated his Christology at least in part to commend Jesus as Messiah who fulfilled the various strands of OT messianic expectations, including those centering on God's visiting his people and dwelling with them in a more permanent way than had previously been the case.

In sum, the destruction of the second temple in A.D. 70 constitutes an eminently plausible factor composing the matrix for the composition of the Fourth Gospel, for the following reasons: (1) it represents an indisputable historical datum, and one that is recent from the vantage point of the writing of the Fourth Gospel; (2) it likely influenced the composition of the Fourth Gospel owing to the universal impact of the destruction of the temple on Jews in both Palestine and the Diaspora; and (3) it is part of a typological substructure that relates physical sanctuaries as provisional manifestations of God's presence to messianic expectations that envision the Messiah to inaugurate a more permanent form of God's presence with his people.

*II. THE TEMPLE MOTIF IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL: READING THE
FOURTH GOSPEL IN LIGHT OF THE RECENT DESTRUCTION
OF THE SECOND TEMPLE*

The above discussion has sought to demonstrate that the destruction of the second temple in A.D. 70 represents a plausible historical datum impacting the composition of the Fourth Gospel. It remains to validate this contention by a close reading of relevant portions of the gospel itself. As will be seen, the insights generated from such a reading of the gospel in light of the then-recent destruction of the temple strongly underscores the plausibility of the main contention of the present essay, namely, that the destruction of the second temple is an important part of the matrix which occasioned the composition of this document. The following discussion will trace the emerging Johannine motif of

- Jesus as the fulfillment (and thus 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).

This includes the recognition that

- physical locations of worship are inadequate (4:19-24) and that

- Jesus now is the proper focus of worship (9:38; 20:28).

While the temple is acknowledged as an important symbol of Jewish religious identity in Jesus' day (11:48-52), John's gospel conveys the recognition that there needed to be a permanent substitute for the temple in the life and worship of God's people in keeping with OT messianic expectations, whereby the silence regarding the temple in John 13-17 points to Jesus as the temple's permanent replacement.

Before dealing with the internal evidence concerning the destruction of the second temple in John's gospel, a preliminary adjudication must be made as to which passages are relevant to this subject. Unfortunately, the literature on the present topic does not yield a clear consensus. R. J. McKelvey, in his important work *The New Temple*, includes 1:14; 1:51; 2:13-22; 4:20-26; 10:16; 11:52; and 12:20ff., whereby the last three passages deal with the gathering of people as the new temple.⁹⁸ P. Walker, in the context of his already mentioned survey of the theme in the entire NT, discusses 1:14; 2:20-21; 4:21-24; 7:14-8:59; 10:22-39; and 11:48-53. Under a separate heading, Walker deals with "the temple of believers," treating 14:2, 23, and other passages, whereby Walker acknowledges that this theme "has been noted less frequently."⁹⁹

Mary Coloe, in her revised thesis *God Dwells With Us*, treats 1:1-18; 2:13-25; 4:1-45; 7:1-8:59; 10:22-42; 14:1-31; and 18:1-19:42. While Coloe argues in favor of replacement, she gives little consideration to historical issues.¹⁰⁰ This is true also of another recent dissertation by Paul Hoskins, who first (owing to the passage's primary importance) discusses 2:18-22 and then proceeds to deal with 1:14, 51, and 4:20-24.¹⁰¹ In a separate chapter, Hoskins covers Jesus' fulfillment of the Jewish festivals Passover, Tabernacles, and Dedication.¹⁰² G. K. Beale, finally, in a recent comprehensive treatment of the temple

⁹⁸R. J. McKelvey, *The New Temple: The Church in the New Testament* (Oxford Theological Monographs; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 75-84. Cf. the survey by Kerr, *Temple of Jesus' Body*, 2-8. Note, however, that Kerr does not interact with Motyer's recent monograph, which is a major omission.

⁹⁹Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City*, 170.

¹⁰⁰Mary L. Coloe, *God Dwells with Us: Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, a revision of "The Dwelling of God Among Us: The Symbolic Function of the Temple in the Fourth Gospel" (Dr. Theol. diss., Melbourne College of Divinity, Australia, 1998). See also Mark Kinzer, "Temple Christology in the Gospel of John" (*SBL Seminar Papers* 37/1; Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1998), 447-64, who points to 1:14; 1:51; 2:20; 4:20-24; chs. 7-10; and 14:2-3 and notes links with wisdom Christology; Jesus as the bearer of the divine name and glory; the vision of God; heaven; and pneumatology; and contends that "the Gospel of John may tell us as much about first-century Jewish Temple mysticism as it does about the first-century Jesus movement" (p. 464).

¹⁰¹Hoskins, "Jesus as the Replacement of the Temple."

¹⁰²Studies of individual Johannine passages include those by L. Nereparampil, *Destroy this Temple: An Exegetico-Theological Study on the Meaning of Jesus's Temple-Logion in Jn 2:19* (Bangalore: Dharmaram College, 1978); and James McCaffrey, *The House with Many Rooms: The Temple Theme of Jn 14,2-3* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1988). J. Lieu, "Temple and Synagogue in John," *NTS* 45 (1999): 51-69, esp. 66-67, contends that Jesus neither replaces nor fulfills the Jerusalem temple.

theme in Scripture, cites 1:14, 51; 2:14-22; 4:10-14, 21-26; 7:37-39 (cf. 20:22).¹⁰³ In tracing “a biblical theology of the dwelling place of God” (the book’s subtitle), Beale devotes a comparatively short albeit suggestive seven and a half pages to temple symbolism in John’s gospel.

After consideration of the above-mentioned literature and the reasons given for inclusion or non-inclusion, the survey below will treat the following passages: 1:14, 51; 2:14-22; 4:19-24; 7:1-8:59; 10:22-39; 11:48-52; plus 9:38 and 20:28 – but not 10:16; 12:20ff.; 13:1-14:3; and 18:20. The reason for exclusion of 10:16 and 12:20ff. is that these passages contain no direct demonstrable temple references (though the OT background is rich).¹⁰⁴ Alleged temple references in 13:1-4 are likewise doubtful and rest on parallels that can hardly establish linkages between the foot washing or the Father’s house with the temple.¹⁰⁵ Finally, 18:20 simply refers to the public nature of Jesus’ teaching “in synagogue and temple” and should not be over-theologized.¹⁰⁶

If the present determination is correct, this would mean that all relevant temple references are found in the first eleven chapters of the gospel.¹⁰⁷ In this section, the temple, as the center of Jewish national and religious identity, serves as the setting for Jesus’ interaction with “the Jews.” As will be seen below, and as is widely acknowledged, during this period there are several important references that suggest that Jesus will replace the temple in the life and worship of the new messianic community. The question remains whether the second major portion of John’s gospel (e.g. chs. 13-21) conjures up notions of temple theology with reference to Jesus (as McCaffrey, Kerr, and others have argued) or whether subsequent to

¹⁰³G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission* (NSBT 17; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 192-200.

¹⁰⁴On John 10:16, see the present author’s “Jesus the Good Shepherd Who Will Also Bring Other Sheep (John 10:16): The Old Testament Background of a Familiar Metaphor,” *BBR* 12 (2002): 67-96.

¹⁰⁵See, e.g., Kerr, *Temple of Jesus’ Body*, 268-313, who essentially follows and further develops McCaffrey, *House with Many Rooms*, though by his own admission, temple parallels in 13:1-14:3 are “less clear” and “in effect [the] argument is cumulative” (p. 7). Kerr argues that, by cleansing them, Jesus prepares his followers for entry in the new temple, just as priests needed to be cleansed in order to be ceremonially clean prior to entering the OT sanctuary. He also maintains that the “Father’s house” in 14:2, taken in connection with 2:21, is Jesus himself (p. 292). However, these conclusions are hardly self-evident. Rather, the emphasis in the farewell discourse seems to be on the lack of need on part of Jesus’ followers for any mediatorial device once Jesus is exalted to the Father (see below). Cf. the critique of McCaffrey’s proposal in Hoskins, “Jesus as the Replacement of the Temple,” 17-20.

¹⁰⁶Contra Lieu, “Temple and Synagogue,” 51-69, esp. 66-67, who contends that in John the temple is not placed under judgment and hence Jesus does not replace the temple. However, this hardly squares with both the action performed and the words spoken by Jesus at the temple clearing in 2:14-22 (see the similar criticism in Kerr, *Temple of Jesus’s Body*, 5 n. 25).

¹⁰⁷John 20:28 is no real exception. Cf. Kinzer, “Temple Christology in the Gospel of John,” 450: “The key texts for Temple Christology in John are found primarily in the prologue and ‘The Book of Signs’ (Jn 1-12).”

Jesus' exaltation there is no substitute for the temple other than Jesus himself (my view).¹⁰⁸ Rather than starting with 2:18-22 (as Hoskins does), it seems best to proceed in narrative sequence.

A. Jesus' Fulfillment of Symbolism Related to Jewish Religious Institutions and Festivals

The all-encompassing nature of Jesus' presentation vis-à-vis the temple in John's Gospel has been well expressed by Cullmann who writes,

Opposition to the Temple worship, or rather, the spiritualization of the Temple worship is an essential idea for the Fourth Gospel. The divine Presence, which had until now been bound to the Temple of Jerusalem, is from now on visible in the Person of Jesus Christ, in the Word made flesh. The Evangelist sees the idea that Christ takes the place of the Temple to be realized *in the events of the life of Jesus*.

Cullmann continues,

He [the evangelist] tries to show through the life of the incarnate Jesus that from now on the question of worship must be asked differently. . . . The Divine glory, in Hebrew *shekinah*, previously limited to the Temple is visible in Jesus Christ. . . . For every Jew the *shekinah*, the Divine glory, is limited to the Temple. But from now on it is separated from the Temple, because it is bound to the *Logos* become flesh.¹⁰⁹

Hence Jesus' replacement of the temple constitutes a comprehensive underlying axiom, which surfaces repeatedly in specific pericopes of the Johannine narrative.¹¹⁰

1. Jesus' Fulfillment of Symbolism Related to Jewish Religious Institutions

The first four chapters of John's gospel (including the prologue) develop an important christological substratum, that of Jesus as the fulfillment of symbolism related to various Jewish religious institutions such as the tabernacle (1:14); Bethel as "the house of God" (1:51); the temple (2:14-22); and Jerusalem (4:19-24).

¹⁰⁸If so, this would be in harmony with Rev 21:22: "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (cf. v. 3). See further below.

¹⁰⁹Oscar Cullmann, "A New Approach to the Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel," *ExpTim* 71 (1959-60): 12, 41-42, cited in Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City*, 170.

¹¹⁰Apart from fulfilling temple symbolism, Jesus is also presented as fulfilling symbolism related to a variety of Jewish religious festivals, including Passover (1:29, 36; 6:4), the Sabbath (5:1-15; ch. 9), Tabernacles (7:14-8:59), and Dedication (10:36; see further below). On the Johannine replacement motif, see esp. Carson, *Gospel According to John*, 399; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII* (AB 29; Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), lxx; and Davies, *Gospel and the Land*, 296 (the latter two cited in Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City*, 170).

a. *The Word made flesh: The new Tabernacle (1:14)*

Not only does John's gospel acknowledge the second temple's central significance in the life of the Jewish nation and point to the inadequacy of physical locations of worship, it presents the manifestation of God's presence in Jesus as the climax of previous, provisional manifestations of God in the history of God's people. This is evident in the programmatic, salvation-historical references to Jesus in the opening verses of the gospel.

John's prologue provides significant data for our present purposes in at least two ways. To begin with, by presenting Jesus as God's agent in creation who came to his own but suffered rejection (1:3-4, 10-11), the prologue provides the pattern which is taken up in the narrative of Jesus' visitation of the temple in 2:14-22. As P. W. L. Walker aptly notes, "When it becomes clear that this God is the God of Israel and that Jesus is himself a Jew, the question is inevitably raised: What will happen when Jesus comes to Jerusalem?"¹¹¹

A second way in which the prologue prepares the reader for the temple clearing is the reference to the Word being made flesh and "dwelling among us" (*skenoō*, 1:14), which links Jesus with God's presence among his people in the tabernacle and later the temple (Exod 26-27; 1 Kgs 6:13).¹¹² Hence Jesus is here shown to appropriate the temple's theological status and to fulfill God's promise to dwell among his people in a new temple.¹¹³ Significantly, what contemporary Judaism claimed for Jerusalem and the Torah, namely that they were the focal points of the entire cosmos, John claims for Jesus.¹¹⁴

Particularly important here is the linkage between the notion of the Word being made flesh in Jesus and the notion of divine glory, since glory is frequently in the OT related to God's self-manifestation in the tabernacle and Solomon's temple.¹¹⁵ Moreover, the Second Temple period witnessed the expectation that God would manifest

¹¹¹Ibid., 163-64, who goes on to suggest that, "As with the other Gospels, the prophecy in Mal. 3:1 (of the 'Lord coming to his Temple') may not be far from the evangelist's mind" (ibid., 164 n. 11).

¹¹²See the thorough discussion of possible links between the prologue and the temple in Kerr, *Temple of Jesus's Body*, 102-25. On 1:14 in relation to Jesus' replacement of the temple in John, see Hoskins, "Jesus as the Replacement of the Temple," 170-84.

¹¹³See the discussion of messianic expectations above. On the connection between NT "filling" references with the OT temple, see my article "What Does It Mean To Be Filled with the Spirit?" *JETS* 40 (1997): 229-40, esp. 230.

¹¹⁴Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City*, 165 n. 14, citing N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 416 (though I do not necessarily endorse the wisdom parallels adduced by Wright). As Walker (ibid., 165, citing Craig R. Koester, *The Dwelling of God: The Tabernacle in the Old Testament, Intertestamental Jewish Literature, and the New Testament* [CBQMS 22; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1989], 115) notes, the tabernacle and the temple could rightly be seen "as God's preparation of his people for the eventual coming of Jesus."

¹¹⁵For references see Hoskins, "Jesus as the Replacement of the Temple," 174 n. 55.

his glory at a future time.¹¹⁶ In a further development of 1:14, the Fourth Evangelist makes clear in 1:16-17 that, while the law constitutes an earlier instance of God's gracious provision for his people, the fullness of his grace was given in and through Jesus Christ.

The thought of 1:14-17 culminates in 1:18 where Jesus is shown to surpass all previous revelations of God, including those to Moses, the law, the tabernacle, and the temple.

b. Jesus and the open heaven: The new House of God (1:51)

While the interpretation of 1:51 is disputed, on any of the major readings the implication of this passage is that it is in and through the Son of Man that God now speaks to his people.¹¹⁷ As the recipient of God's word, like Jacob, Jesus conveys God's message to others. Similar to Jacob's ladder, Jesus is also the means of communication by which God speaks. Thus Jesus constitutes the typological fulfillment of the pattern initiated and anticipated by Bethel, the first "house of God."

The Son of Man, in turn, will be "lifted up" (crucified as well as honored; 3:16; 8:28; 12:32), which focuses God's revelation in his Son particularly on the latter's crucifixion and resurrection (clustered in John's gospel under the rubric of "glorification," 12:23; 17:1). Importantly, the Son of Man of 1:51 is related to the incarnate Word of 1:14, both of which anticipate 2:14-22 and 4:19-24, constituting Jesus' replacement/fulfillment of sacred space as an important substructure of Johannine Christology.¹¹⁸

c. Clearing the sanctuary: The new Temple (2:14-22)

Perhaps the primary pericope in this regard is the account of Jesus' clearing of the temple in 2:14-22.¹¹⁹ I have argued elsewhere that the temple clearing is properly to be considered a Johannine sign.¹²⁰ While not "miraculous" in the sense of natural laws being suspended, the event fits one of the OT paradigms of a *sēmeion*, that

¹¹⁶Cf. Sir. 36:19; 2 Macc. 2:7-8; 4QFlor I, 5.

¹¹⁷Though note Kerr, *Temple of Jesus' Body*, 136-66, who devotes an entire chapter to an investigation of 1:51 and concludes that there is in that passage no reference to Jacob's ladder or to the house of God, Bethel, nor is there any pre-Christian evidence linking Bethel with the temple (contra Davies, *Gospel and the Land*, 296-97; A. T. Hanson, *The Prophetic Gospel* [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991], 73; and McKelvey, *New Temple*, 77).

¹¹⁸Hoskins, "Jesus as the Replacement of the Temple," 199.

¹¹⁹See *ibid.*, 158-70, which discusses 2:18-22 first.

¹²⁰Andreas J. Köstenberger, "The Seventh Johannine Sign: A Study in John's Christology," *BBR* 5 (1995): 87-103 = *Studies in John and Gender: A Decade of Scholarship* (SBL 38; New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 99-116. On the NT characterization of the Jerusalem temple, see esp. Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City*, 162, who notes that eighty percent of the Johannine narrative are located in Jerusalem compared with thirty percent in Matthew.

is, an act of predictive-prophetic symbolism (see, e.g., Isa 20:3). This is affirmed, among others, by Walker, who suggests “that Jesus’ cleansing of the Temple was an enacted parable, a sign of its forthcoming destruction.”¹²¹ If this proposal is correct, the temple clearing takes on pivotal significance for John’s portrayal of Jesus’ messianic mission. As one of Jesus’ early Jerusalem signs (see 2:23; 3:2), the temple clearing signals Jesus’ zeal to restore pure worship of God in the central sanctuary of the Jewish capital (echoing OT prophetic concerns: cf. Zech 14:21; Mal 3:1, 3).¹²² What is more, Jesus’ “ironic imperative” in 2:19 ominously presages that “[t]he Temple would be profoundly affected by the coming of Jesus, and especially by his death.”¹²³

The time of the temple clearing, that is, Passover (2:13, 23), lends further significance to the event and is part of the Fourth Evangelist’s portrayal of Jesus in terms of Passover fulfillment and replacement. At the heart of the temple clearing is judgment symbolism. Jesus hints at the future destruction of the temple (“Destroy this temple,” 2:19), which the readers of the Fourth Gospel in all likelihood know came to pass in recent years, and the evangelist identifies the “temple” as Jesus’ body (2:21). It is not that the physical structure of the temple will be “raised” (that is, restored after destruction); rather, Jesus’ body will be raised from the dead after having been crucified.

The Jews, for their part, are incredulous that something as enduring as the temple (note the reference to the forty-six years in 2:20¹²⁴) would be destroyed, forgetting that similar judgment fell on the sanctuary at the time of the Babylonian exile. They are even more incredulous that it could be restored in just three days (or so they interpreted the meaning of Jesus’ words). Yet what to them sounded like the utterances of one who rather apparently had lost his mind, quite literally came to pass in the years to come: Jesus was raised, and the temple was destroyed (cf. Matt 24:1-2 par.). While Jerusalem

¹²¹Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City*, 165.

¹²²See *ibid.*, 177-80; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (rev. ed.; NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 166-69. For the present purposes, it is sufficient to suppose that the clearing recorded in John is historical rather than merely theologically motivated. This is suggested, among other things, by the fairly tight chronological embeddedness of the pericope in the Johannine narrative and by the fact that John’s gospel as a whole seems to follow a chronological format of presentation (see esp. the chart in Köstenberger, *Encountering John*, 67, and the more detailed chart in *idem*, “John,” *ZIBBC* 2.23).

¹²³Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City*, 166.

¹²⁴On the interpretation of the reference to the forty-six years in 2:20, see Köstenberger, “John,” *ZIBBC* 2.33. Contra Brown, *Gospel According to John*, 1.115, who starts counting from the start (rather than completion) of construction in 20/19 B.C. and thus reaches a date of A.D. 27/28 (rather than 29/30), and then puzzlingly says the fifteenth year of Tiberius referred to in Luke 3:1 is A.D. 27/28 according to the Syrian calendar with antedating (more likely, with Tiberius’s reign commencing in A.D. 14, the fifteenth year is A.D. 29).

lost its central place of worship, with Jesus a new center of worship arose that commanded widespread faith and acceptance.

The interim between Jesus' resurrection and the destruction of the temple still veiled the revolutionary implications of these events for Judaism. Yet when the temple was finally destroyed, Jewish worship, already corrupt and defiled in Jesus' day, suffered a fatal blow and left worship of Jesus at least temporarily without operational alternative. It is my contention that it is this vacuum that John sought to exploit by writing his gospel. This is why the second Johannine sign still possessed relevance for his audience: the recent destruction of the temple transparently vindicated Jesus' act of clearing the temple as a precursor of the divine judgment and demonstrated the true prophetic symbolism attached to the event.

The Jews in Jesus' original audience do not understand; having witnessed the temple clearing, the sign of Jesus' prophetic pronouncement of destruction on the Jerusalem sanctuary, they ask for a sign (2:18)—but Jesus provides none, simply elaborating upon the significance of the act he has just performed. What is more, as the Fourth Evangelist frankly acknowledges, Jesus' followers likewise failed to understand at the time as well. Only when their memory was triggered by the resurrection itself did they make the connection (2:22). Yet the Fourth Gospel's first intended readers had the benefit of being able to read the temple clearing pericope in the light of then-recent events, most of all the temple's destruction.

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. Indeed, "Jesus himself, in his own body, was a new 'Temple,' . . . [who] embodied in himself the meaning of the Temple and all that it had previously signified."¹²⁵

d. The inadequacy of physical locations of worship: The new worship (4:19-24)

The motif of Jesus' replacement of sacred space emerges with increasing clarity in the Johannine narrative, from allusions in 1:14 and 51 to more overt references in 2:14-22 and the present passage.¹²⁶ While Jesus is identified already as the "new temple" at the temple clearing, his interchange with the Samaritan woman in 4:19-24 crystallizes the issue yet further. In response to the Samaritan's

¹²⁵Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City*, 163.

¹²⁶See Hoskins, "Jesus as the Replacement of the Temple," 199; and the same author's examination of 4:20-24 in light of its context in the Fourth Gospel as well as the OT and extra-biblical Jewish parallels on pp. 200-214.

question of whether proper worship was to be rendered on Mt. Gerizim or in Jerusalem, Jesus transcends the dichotomy by suggesting that worship pleasing to God is not contingent on physical location but is a matter of spirit and truth. The clear implication of Jesus' words is that, while Jewish is clearly superior to Samaritan worship in that it is based, not on ignorance, but on knowledge (4:22), even the Jerusalem temple is not the final word on the subject.

Just as the Samaritan temple had been destroyed 150 years prior to Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan (Josephus, *Ant.* 13.255-56), so the Jerusalem sanctuary did not represent the permanent standard for worship of God.¹²⁷ Rather, such worship must be rendered "in spirit and truth" (4:23). This follows from the fact that God himself is spirit (4:24). As Walker notes,

Even though the events of AD 70 took place forty years later, the manifestation of Jesus meant that in principle the time had already come when "Jerusalem" (4:21) would lose its distinctive status: "the time is coming and *has now come*" (4:23).¹²⁸

Later in the Johannine narrative, the formerly blind man becomes an example of true worship (9:38). Perhaps significantly, this worship is rendered after the man's expulsion from the synagogue (9:22).¹²⁹

Worship in spirit and truth, then, is superior to worship at physical locations such as the temple for the following reasons. First, such spiritual worship is commensurate to God's nature as spirit. Second, worship in spirit, rather than tied to a physical location, is in keeping with faith as the universal requirement for inclusion in the people of God, which transcends belonging to an ethnic group as a distinctive (cf. 1:12; 3:16). Third, such worship is "in truth," that is, focused on Jesus as "the truth" (14:6) and based on his final, definitive revelation of the Father (14:9-11; cf. 1:18; 10:30). Such worship is part of the discipleship desired by Jesus, which involves holding to his teaching, which in turn results in liberation by and for truth (8:31-32). Fourth, there also seems to be an implicit connection between worship "in spirit and truth" and the "Spirit of truth" (14:17; 15:26; 16:12), whom Jesus' followers were about to receive.

B. Jesus' Fulfillment of Symbolism Related to Jewish Religious Festivals

While the first four chapters of John's gospel feature the emerging motif of Jesus' replacement of Jewish religious institutions such as the tabernacle (1:14), Bethel the "house of God" (1:51), the temple (2:14-22), or Jerusalem itself (4:19-24), the second major portion of the first half of John's gospel (i.e., chs. 5-12) further

¹²⁷See Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City*, 166.

¹²⁸*Ibid.*, 197; similarly, 166.

¹²⁹See *ibid.*, 169. On 9:38, see the discussion below.

develops this motif in terms of Jesus' fulfillment/replacement of the symbolism of various Jewish religious festivals such as Tabernacles or Dedication.¹³⁰

1. *Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles: The New Provision (7:1-8:59)*

Subsequent to the temple clearing of 2:14-22, Jesus several times returns to Jerusalem and the temple at the occasions of religious festivals such as Tabernacles (7:1-8:59) or Dedication (10:22-39). As Walker correctly points out, the placement of the temple clearing early in John's gospel has the effect of placing Jesus' subsequent involvement with the temple "under a cloud."¹³¹ The readers are aware that Jesus' appearances at the temple must not be construed as his endorsement of that institution; the temple simply served as the natural chosen site for Jesus' instruction of his followers in Jerusalem (cf. 18:20). Yet at the same time, Jesus' return visits to the temple are necessitated by his identity as the temple's substitute, the "new temple." For it is impossible for him to claim to be such at a distance; this claim must be asserted on site.

Jesus does so in several ways. First, he relates his coming to symbolism entailed by the feast of Tabernacles—which looked back to Moses producing water by striking the rock in the wilderness (Exod 17:1-7; Num 20:8-13) and forward to a day when water would flow from Jerusalem and the temple (Ezek 47:1-12; Zech 14:8)—by issuing the statement that "rivers of living water" would flow from the innermost being of believers in the Messiah (7:37-38).¹³² Thus prophetic symbolism is not only fulfilled but superseded: water would flow, not from Jerusalem and the temple, but from believers nurtured by their messianic faith.

Second, Jesus claims to be "the light of the world" (not merely Jerusalem, 8:12; cf. 9:5), once again fulfilling, yet transcending, Jewish categories. This statement does not merely engage Tabernacles symbolism, it also involves a claim on Jesus' part regarding the "I am," the divine name. Hence replacement theology is inherent in Jesus' self-designation "I am" which comes to the fore in the series of "I am statements" featured in the Fourth Gospel. Previous to Jesus' coming, it had been the temple that constituted the *locus* of the divine name. Now John presents us with "a new *locus*—not a place but a person. . . . The time of fulfillment has come: the Temple is to be replaced—by a person."¹³³ Notably, the conflict surrounding Jesus ensues in his departure from the temple, an act of

¹³⁰Other examples include the Sabbath (ch. 5) and Passover (ch. 6).

¹³¹See Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City*, 167.

¹³²This presupposes a traditional (rather than narrowly christological) reading of the present passage (see, e.g., C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John* [2d ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978], 327).

¹³³Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City*, 168.

judgment akin to the withdrawal of the divine presence (8:59; cf. Matt 23:38-24:1).

2. *Jesus at the Feast of Dedication: The New Liberation (10:22-39)*

Jesus returns to the temple in 10:22-39, though “compared to the extended episode in 7:14-8:59, this is but a brief return, and Jesus’ location ‘in Solomon’s Colonnade’ indicates his comparative ‘disengagement’ from the festival proceedings.”¹³⁴ The present visit turns out to be the final visit to the temple recorded in John’s gospel. There is but one more mention of Jesus’ presence at the temple in the subsequent narrative in 18:20 where reference is made to his preceding public teaching ministry. In the Johannine context, this can only refer to the previous instances recorded in 2:14-22; 7:14-8:59; and 10:22-39.¹³⁵

C. *Jesus as the Proper Focus of Worship*

1. *Giving Sight to the Blind: A New Way of Seeing (9:38)*

The first major reference to an individual’s worship of Jesus in John’s gospel is that to the man born blind in 9:38. In light of the opening references to Jesus Christ as the pre-existent, divine Word, not to mention other references to Jesus’ pre-existence in this gospel (e.g., 8:58; 17:25), this scene of worship (together with other references such as 20:28; see below) clearly identifies Jesus as both divine and the proper object of worship. While it has often been alleged that the Fourth Gospel’s high Christology (including its reference to Jesus as object of worship) is a late development and unhistorical, such skepticism seems unfounded. On the one hand, not only John, but also the Synoptics, make clear that the major charge against Jesus leading to his crucifixion was that of blasphemy.¹³⁶ Hence even his opponents acknowledged, not only that Jesus performed remarkable miracles, but that he claimed divinity for himself. If this is so, however, there seems to be no good reason to dispute that Jesus’ followers directed worship toward Jesus. Clearly Jesus was no ordinary rabbi; he taught with unparalleled authority and supported his messianic claims with tangible demonstrations of his identity (the “signs”).¹³⁷

¹³⁴Ibid., 169.

¹³⁵So rightly Walker in *ibid.*, 169 n. 32.

¹³⁶See Darrell L. Bock, *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism and the Final Examination of Jesus* (WUNT 2/106; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1998).

¹³⁷On Jesus as a rabbi, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, “Jesus as a Rabbi in the Fourth Gospel,” *BBR* 8 (1998): 97-128; on Jesus’ signs, see *idem*, “Seventh Johannine Sign.”

2. *Eliciting Faith from the Skeptic: Seeing and Believing (20:28)*

Thomas's confession of Jesus as "my Lord and my God" in 20:28 constitutes an *inclusio* with 1:1 and represents the most overt instance of worship of Jesus as God in any of the gospels. Earlier in the gospel, Thomas emerged as a sharp yet skeptical member of the twelve (11:16). The present instance follows on the heels of Jesus' resurrection appearance to the twelve-minus-Judas-minus-Thomas. When Jesus appears again to the same group, this time with Thomas being present, the latter becomes the foil for Jesus' lesson that believing apart from seeing is superior to believing on the basis of physical sight. For the gospel's readers, this constitutes an encouragement to believe the apostolic testimony enshrined in the present gospel rather than expecting or demanding "signs" akin to the one Jesus had performed during the course of his earthly ministry with the Jews. As in the case of the formerly blind man in 9:38, Thomas's believing confession climaxes the narrative. What is more, Thomas's confession climaxes the entire gospel, making the decisive point that the only proper response to the Fourth Gospel's revelation that Jesus is the fulfillment of Jewish religious symbolism is that of worship.

*D. The Destruction of the "Holy Place":
The Temple as a Symbol of Jewish Religious Identity (11:48-52)*

Placed toward the end of the first half of the gospel is 11:48-52, one of several passages which evidences the importance of the temple as a symbol of Jewish religious identity in Jesus' day. In this irony-laden passage, the Jewish high priest Caiaphas justifies the Sanhedrin's decision to have Jesus crucified by saying this is necessary in order to avert the threat of the Roman destruction of the Jewish "holy place" (that is, the temple) and nation. Hence, for the Jews, the temple is viewed as central to the nation's ethos.

As the reader is perfectly aware, of course, Caiaphas's strategy turned out to be a miscalculation of colossal proportions. Not only did Jesus rise (thus thwarting the Jewish leadership's attempt to silence him), but the temple was destroyed by the Romans all the same. In hindsight, this means that Jesus, not the Jewish leadership, stands vindicated by the divine verdict rendered on behalf of Jesus over against the representatives of old-style Judaism, which centered on the temple and the external trappings of Jewish worship.

Ironically, therefore, Jesus would still "be involved mysteriously in the Temple's destruction—though not in the way the Sanhedrin feared."¹³⁸ As Walker asks,

Was there was [*sic*] any organic connection between the eventual fate of the Temple and the way Jesus, who had already been

¹³⁸Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City*, 166-67.

presented as a new "Temple" (2:22), was sacrificed so that that "old" Temple might be preserved? John does not make this connection explicit; yet his readers have been given some clear encouragement to develop their thoughts along these lines.¹³⁹

In its acknowledgment of the temple as a central Jewish religious symbol, the Fourth Gospel is firmly in keeping with historical data suggesting that the temple did indeed have such a function in Jewish life in Jesus' day. This explains why Jesus squarely addressed the function of the temple in contemporary Judaism and related his own coming as Jewish Messiah to the temple's significance. The reference to the temple in 11:48-52 comes at an important juncture in the Fourth Gospel where old-style Judaism is shown to cling vainly to its national symbol.

E. A Telling Silence: The Setting Aside of the Temple (13-21)

With the one previously noted exception of 18:20 (not a real exception), the Fourth Evangelist is notably silent on the temple in the second half of his gospel. As Walker observes, "The subsequent setting aside of the Temple within John's narrative indicates how it has also been set aside within the purposes of God. The Temple has been eclipsed."¹⁴⁰ In a derivative sense, Walker contends that believers are shown to share in Jesus' status as the new temple, pointing especially to the reference to the "Father's house" in 14:2. However, it is far from clear that this reference is to be construed in terms of temple imagery.¹⁴¹ Moreover, Walker's contention seems to stand in conflict with the observation that John is silent regarding the temple in the second half of his gospel. To be sure, other NT writers (such as Paul and Peter) apply temple symbolism to believers; it is not clear that this is done by the Fourth Evangelist.

More promising, however, is the emphasis on Jesus as the one who provides direct access to the Father in the farewell discourse (e.g. 14:6-11; 16:26-27). No longer must worshipers come to God by sacrificing in the temple; they can simply approach God through prayer in Jesus' name. Hence it is consistent in a section that everywhere anticipates Jesus' exaltation with the Father that the temple is all but gone: for Jesus' presence with the Father will render any other mediatorial edifice unnecessary. As Jesus predicted in the sign of the temple clearing and in his statement to the Samaritan woman, and as the Fourth Evangelist explained, he himself in his body is the temple through whom worshipers in the future must offer worship acceptable to the Father.

¹³⁹Ibid., 196.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., 169.

¹⁴¹Cf. Köstenberger, "John," *ZIBBC* 2.137.

III. CONCLUSION

The above investigation has demonstrated that the destruction of the second temple in A.D. 70 provides an important contemporary historical datum that likely impacted the composition of the Fourth Gospel, and that reading the gospel in light of this then-recent event makes excellent sense especially of the gospel's treatment of the temple and related Jewish festival symbolism as fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah. Thus external and internal evidence appear to converge: What the external historical evidence suggests as a likely backdrop to the writing of John's gospel—specifically, the after-effects of the destruction of the temple especially in the Diaspora—yields a rich and highly plausible reading of the Fourth Gospel in light of the evangelist's thematic development of Jesus as the fulfillment and replacement of temple symbolism as well as that related to other Jewish festivals and institutions.

Arguably, this reading of the gospel evidence turns out to be superior to that offered by many of the proponents of various permutations of the "Johannine community hypothesis," whether they take their point of departure from the (supposedly anachronistic) references to synagogue expulsion in 9:22 and 34 (cf. 12:42; 16:2) or engage in a variety of other source- or redaction-critical reconstructions of an alleged "Johannine school" or "community." Reading the gospel in light of the then-recent destruction of the temple has the advantage of drawing on a considerably larger and more pervasive thematic base—that of Jesus fulfilling and replacing the temple and other Jewish festivals and institutions—than mirror-reading the gospel along sectarian lines.

Little of the material presented above is original. Much invaluable specialized research on various aspects related to the subject at hand has been carried out by a wide variety of scholars. Yet rarely has this material been made subservient to the question of the likely occasion for writing the Fourth Gospel. The purpose of the present essay was therefore to integrate the most persuasive and competent research, both historically and theologically, into a synthesis that best merges historical information, literary study, and theological apprehension of the Johannine narrative. Perhaps the hope is not entirely unrealistic that a new (or at least renewed) paradigm will emerge in the study of John's gospel in which the destruction of the temple will assume its rightful and very significant place in the background of its composition.

Doubtless reading of the gospel in this light will result in recovering an important aspect of John's message, intended and highly relevant for his first readers, that, now that the temple had been destroyed, the resurrected Jesus was without peer or rival as the new tabernacle, the new temple, and the new center of worship for a new nation which encompasses all those who are united by faith in Jesus as Messiah. Walker crystallizes the issue well:

As a result, if any of his readers felt bereft of the Temple and of the spiritual focus provided by Jerusalem, John would have encouraged them not to mourn the loss of the city, but rather to see what God had done for them in Jesus. . . . The Evangelist, writing after the Temple's destruction, does not bemoan its loss. . . . The presence of God has not been withdrawn, for Jesus has taken the place of the Temple. Jesus gives more than the Temple had ever given. . . . Jesus stands in the place of everything that Israel has lost.¹⁴²

In fact, "Everything previously associated with Jerusalem was now available in the person of Jesus, mediated by the Spirit." He was the new temple, the "true vine": "In Jesus these Jewish beliefs were all affirmed."¹⁴³

Now, however, a new allegiance was required, and "a preparedness to say good-bye to the old." Contrary to what his audience may have felt, there was indeed "life after the destruction of the temple," life "without Jerusalem."¹⁴⁴ The old order had given way to the new.

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.¹⁴⁵

To urge his (predominantly) Jewish readers to take this farewell to the old, and to step out into the adventure of a new life now and forever in communion with Jesus the Messiah, John wrote his gospel.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴²Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City*, 197, citing Edwyn C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (ed. F. N. Davey; London: Faber & Faber, 1940), 1.144; and Stephen Motyer, *John 8:31-59 and the Rhetoric of Persuasion in the Fourth Gospel* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis; King's College, London, 1992), 3. See also John W. Pryor, *John: Evangelist of the Covenant People* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 115.

¹⁴³Walker, *Jesus and the Holy City*, 198.

¹⁴⁴*Ibid.*, 199.

¹⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 199-200.

¹⁴⁶This is true despite Walker's comment that "John's reflection upon Jerusalem might not be simply a response to the great events of AD 66-70; it could be an explication of things which long before that date he had discerned to be implicit in the essential gospel message about Jesus" (*Jesus and the Holy City*, 199).