

Bible Interpretation

The Temple in Early Christianity: Experiencing the Sacred

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Introduction

Jesus is on the cross. People pass by, mocking him: "Aha! You who would destroy the Temple and build it in three days, save yourself, come down from the cross!" (Mark 15:29-30). Several years later Paul, standing on the steps of the Roman castle in Jerusalem after being arrested, addresses the crowd who attacked him a short while earlier in the Temple courtyard. He speaks of Jesus' revelation to him on the road to Damascus, stressing that when he had returned to Jerusalem "and while I was praying in the Temple, I fell into a trance" (Acts 22:17). In the Letter to the Hebrews, "Christ came as a high priest... through the greater and perfect Tabernacle not made with hands... he entered once for all into the Holy Place... obtaining eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:11-12).

In these three passages Jesus is crucified as the enemy of the Temple, Paul declares his devotion to the Temple, and Hebrews introduces a Temple in heaven where Christ serves as a high priest. These passages illustrate the importance of the Temple for the early Christians, and also indicate diversity in the New Testament's attitude towards the Temple.

This book examines the Temple in early Christianity from two perspectives: the attitude towards the Temple as an institution where pilgrims visit, meet one another and offer sacrifices; and the Temple as a symbol of commitment and proximity to God. Sometimes

these two aspects appear to be in conflict, when the Temple as an institution does not fulfill its destiny as a symbol. One of the aims of this project is to demonstrate the significance of these two aspects and their complex relationship.

My analysis is based on four criteria for classifying attitudes towards the Temple: Attendance (visiting the Temple), Analogy (modeling religious ideas and rituals after the Temple or sacrifices), Criticism and Rejection. In the following chapters I explore the aspects of the Temple cult that appeal to the NT authors, what characteristics of the cult are challenged, and why.

The Temple is the heart of ancient Judaism, in both an institutional and a symbolic sense. But what about the Christians? I regard the NT authors and readers – I refer to them as "Christians", which is indeed an anachronism for the believers in Jesus – as inherently related to Jewish civilization.¹ They believe in the one and only God of Israel, frequently cite the Hebrew Bible, and relate to Jewish religion and practices (such as the Sabbath and Passover). Early Christian discourse about the Temple engages with Judaism, or, according to another scholarly perspective, with early Christianity's own Jewishness. This discourse is laden with deep religious sentiments, both positive and negative. Most NT texts allude to the Temple at a time when the physical structure is no longer in existence, and yet the Temple remains significant and even central to the authors of Luke, Hebrews and Revelation. What aspects of the Temple and the sacrificial cult are relevant to NT authors? Why do they still engage with these issues when they are no longer practical? In what sense is the Temple cult rejected or replaced by early Christian religious innovations, and in what manner does the Temple theme serve as a continuation of Jewish tradition in the formation of early Christianity?

This book attempts to study virtually all the explicit treatments of the Temple and the Temple cult in the NT. My method is conventional textual criticism, and my general approach is historical, aiming to understand not merely texts but the people who write and read them during the first century CE. I am less interested in the theological concerns of Christians or Jews after the first century CE. I seek to understand early Christianity as a religious movement in the first century CE. The book has two objectives: to offer the reader an accessible presentation of the texts and their meaning according to current scholarship; and to provide a systematic analysis which presents my own interpretation of the various attitudes towards the Temple in the NT.

While working on this book I have found a vast amount of scholarship on the subject, in several languages. To corroborate the information in even half of these books and articles

¹ The designation "Christians" is mentioned only three times in the NT (Acts 11:26; 26:28; 1 Pet 4:16). Self-identity of Christianity as distinct from Judaism is first introduced in the second century by Ignatius of Antioch (Magn. 10.3; cf. 8.1; Philad. 6.1).

would not only have made this book difficult to write, but also difficult to read. Therefore I present only that which I find the most relevant, in the interests of clarity and accessibility. I trust I will be excused for omitting many interesting studies and reducing others to references in the footnotes.

Although many monographs on the gospels, Hebrews, Revelation, and the Pauline letters are dedicated to the Temple, very few attempt to impart a panoramic view of the Temple and the cult throughout the NT.² None actually discuss all the relevant NT texts, hence the synthesis they present is far from conclusive. They do not present the entire spectrum of NT approaches to the cult, and at times they are heavily influenced by a theological rather than a historical critical approach. Therefore these discussions cannot accurately account for the diversity and historical development of early Christian approaches to the Temple. In other studies, too, scholars pay insufficient attention to the historical setting of the Temple in ancient Judaism, or to early Christians' adherence to basic Jewish ideas and practices.

In many studies, the main thrust is aimed at whether or not the early Christians of the first century CE are committed to the Jerusalem Temple, either practically or symbolically. Most NT scholars stress the early Christian negative approach to the Temple: Jesus, the evangelists, and the author of Hebrews reject it, while Paul and 1 Peter "spiritualize" it, creating alternatives to the cult.³ It is commonly argued that there are at least four different ways in which the Temple is superseded in the NT texts: the Church is the new Temple, the individual believer is the Temple, the Temple is in heaven, and the Temple is Jesus' body.⁴ Some commentators even assume that the break with the Temple should be traced to the very origin of the Christian movement: the Historical Jesus already regarded himself or the Church as the new Temple or believed he was the new high priest (see Chapter 1). However, recent scholarship evinces more sensitivity towards the complex treatment of the Temple theme in

² Beale 2004; Wardle 2010; Fassbeck 2001:36-110, 193-214. Mckevley 1969 and Daly 1978 deal only with the Temple *or* sacrifices. A short and very partial survey is provided in Turner 1979:106-157.

³ For example: Moule 1950; Cullmann 1958-59; McKelvey 1969; Gaston 1970:4-5, 240-243; Juel 1977; Fassbeck 2001. For spiritualization, see Klinzing 1971. For example, Wardle 2010:221-226 argues that the transference of Temple terminology to the Christian community occurred very early in the nascent Christian movement. Already the apostles in Jerusalem were not merely analogical to the Temple but "saw themselves as a temple." He suggests that the apostles' "templization of the early Christian" is a reaction against the Temple leadership and its priestly overseers because they were antagonistic to the Christians.

⁴ Brown 1966:124. Church-Temple: Eph 2:19-21; 1 Pet 2:5; 4:17; Individual-Temple: 1 Cor 3:16; 4:19; Ignatius, Phila 7:2; 2 Clement 9:3; Heaven-Temple: Rev 11:19; Heb 9:11-12: Temple-Jesus Body: John 2:19.

the NT. Certain studies indicate that even Paul and John expressed appreciation of the Temple, tracing the manner in which Temple themes influenced early Christianity.⁵

The Assumed Tension between Christ's Atonement and Sacrifices

Why do so many NT scholars regard the early Christians as rejecting, challenging or replacing the Temple? What assumption underlies the so-called supersessionist approach? Many of those who write about the Temple assume that there is tension between the sacrificial system and early Christian belief. The core of this tension is theological, pertaining to the role atonement plays in both. The basic purpose of sacrifice is to atone for sin, and Jesus died to atone for the sins of his believers. The following are three views of this conflict;

According to Esler, "it is, indeed, very difficult to imagine how a theory of the atoning death of Jesus, already present in Paul and Mark, and indeed, in Pre-Pauline and Pre-Markan traditions, could have arisen among Jews who preserved close links with the sacrificial cult."

Since Jesus provides direct access to the Father (e.g., John 14:6-11; 16:26-27), Köstenberger maintains that "no longer must worshipers come to God by sacrificing in the temple; they can simply approach God through prayer in Jesus' name."

Similarly, Hengel contends that since Jesus' death brought universal atonement once for all (e.g. Rom 6:10; 1 Peter 3:18) there is "a fundamental break with the atoning and saving significance of sacrifice in the worship of the Temple in Jerusalem... Atonement through the Temple cult finds its *end* and at the same time also its *fulfillment* in the eschatological saving event on the Golgotha."⁶

However, there is only one NT text which explains the transition of the role of atonement from the sacrificial cult to Christ: the Letter to the Hebrews. The author argues that effective atonement is only achieved through Christ, and not by the high priest and animal sacrifices, that needed to be repeated time and again (Heb 7:26-27). Furthermore, while the blood of sacrifices purifies the soul, Christ's blood purifies the conscience (Heb 9:12-14).

⁵ E.g., Lieu 1999; Fuglseth 2005; Hogeterp 2006; Horn 2007.

⁶ Esler 1987:158; Köstenberger 2006:106; Hengel 1981:47, 53 (*italics original*). In fact, the notion that the Temple and Jesus both compete on being the major or perhaps even the sole means of atonement, is spelled out by Origen (*Comm. In Joann* 10, 24), who argues that Jesus' "cleansing" of the Temple is a symbol for the irrelevance of material sacrifices. According to Daly 1978:3, the concept of Christian sacrifice is built on that of Origen. A further possibility for this approach is modern rejection of animal sacrifice (on which, see Klawans 2006:6-10). Ullucci 2012:30, 42 criticizes the evolutionary tendency to regard the development of sacrifice in the Greco-Roman world and early Christianity as a progression from crude ritual to "pure religion," as if sacrifices were destined to be replaced.

One can also refer to Paul's outright assertion against the Law: "for if justification comes through the Law, then Christ died for nothing" (Gal 2:21). This may be interpreted as if Christ's "justification," which is related to (but not identical with) atonement also replaces the sacrificial cult, within the scope of the Law. Paul may be hinting that adherence to the Temple cult along with the belief in Jesus as "ransom for the many" is a sort of "double booking", and attests to imperfect Christian faith. Yet, Paul's intention in these passages may not be as straightforward as it appears when read out of context.⁷ Paul never speaks directly about the question of observing the Temple practice. His approach is reflected in his cultic metaphors, and deserves a detailed analysis. The tension between Christ and the Temple is therefore poorly demonstrated in the NT, and is mainly a matter of later theological interpretation.

There is another good reason to dispense with the equation (and the resulting replacement) of Christ's atonement with the sacrificial cult. The Temple serves functions other than atonement. While many sacrifices are offered to atone for the individual or the entire Jewish people (such as in the Day of Atonement),⁸ it would be wrong to reduce the entire purpose of the cult to atonement. Sacrifices carry other meanings as well; above all, the maintenance of the dwelling of God's presence.⁹ In Psalms, for example, the cult has several meanings: acknowledging God's supremacy and righteousness, thanking God, adherence to God's commandments, and above all, visiting the Temple as an experience of the sacred.¹⁰ My point is that even if Christ atones for one's sins, the Temple is not necessarily superfluous. A Jew who believes in Jesus may yet feel the need to visit the Temple and offer sacrifices to fulfill other aspects of cultic worship. It is also not inconceivable that some people would prefer to pursue multiple means of atonement at one and the same time, just "to be on the safe side." Furthermore, if certain followers of Jesus sense tension or even a contradiction between Christ and the Temple as agents of atonement, this would hardly apply to all or perhaps even most of them. We shall see that just as there are various approaches towards the Temple in ancient Judaism, there are also diverse voices within early Christianity.

⁷ According to Dunn 1993:148-149, the meaning of the Law is limited here to preventing the Gentiles from participating in the grace of God (cf. Gal 3:13-14).

⁸ Gesse 1981:100, 103, to give one example, assumes that in the priestly theology, atonement is the basis of the cult. The cult is possible only as an act of atonement, and in P all sacrifices bring atonement. Cf. Janowski 1982. On the daily sacrifice as atoning, see Jub 6:14; 50:11.

⁹ Klawans 2006:56-73 who also points to the meaning of *imitatio Dei*. See the function of the *tamid* daily sacrifice in Ex 29:42-46.

¹⁰ E.g., Ps 27:4-5; 42:3-6; 50:5-9, 13-15, 21-23; 54:8; 96:6; 116:13-19; 118:19-20. See Regev 2004c, where I try to show that sacrifice is a means for the worshiper to approach God.

It would be methodologically wrong to assume that for first-century believers in Jesus the Temple was redundant, before actually examining the evidence. One should not presuppose the outcome of such an investigation. And one should try to examine the sources free of theological or any other predispositions. Scholarly assumptions and tendencies are unavoidable, especially when the evidence is scarce and one can only complete the picture through theory and intuition. However, this is not the case here, because the NT text provides many passages which engage with the Temple explicitly and in detail.

I therefore find the replacement-of-atonement theory very disturbing, and not only because it is supersessionist, arguing that Christianity is the heir to Judaism. If this is indeed the view of the first century Christians, the historian cannot argue against his own research subject. The problem is that first-rate scholars assume that atonement moved from the Temple to Christ before reading the text carefully, and interpret the NT passages in this light. I think one should have as few presuppositions as possible before approaching the evidence, and let the ancient authors speak for themselves.

I am not suggesting that we put aside the question of how belief in Christ conflicts with worship in the Temple, but rather that we approach it from a historical perspective, with much sensitivity for the text itself and its literary context, and that we remain aware of the complexity of religious ideas. One example of this complexity is the fact that Luke's Paul was devoted to the Temple and purified himself before entering it (Acts 21:26; 22:17) although Luke probably knew that for Paul, Christ atones for sin, and Luke himself regards the coming of Christ as a means for forgiveness of sin (Acts 5:31).

Excursus: John the Baptist and the Temple

The theory of a contrast between the sacrificial cult and the independent-individual forgiveness-atonement system also characterizes scholarship on John the Baptist. Since the Baptist grants his followers remission of sins (Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3), recent scholars assume that this must have been at the expense of the Temple.

Crossan maintains that while sacrifices in the Temple were expensive, John proposes an inexpensive and available rite, which is effective for absolution from all sins. John's innovation was that the average person can do something to prepare himself for the catastrophic coming of the kingdom.¹¹ According to Webb, John's baptism functions in a manner similar to sacrifices (Webb also recalls that John is a priest) – serving as absolution of sin. John "offered an alternative to a primary function of the Temple, and so was a threat to the temple establishment." John's baptism was "probably a replacement for the temple rite, at least temporarily" since "receiving John's baptism probably functioned as a form of protest

¹¹ Crossan 1991:231, following Morton Smith. See also Hengel and Schwemer 2007:316-317.

against the temple establishment."¹² Others also reconstruct a cold relationship between the Baptist and the Temple authorities, surmising that John's eschatological beliefs are probably also directed against the Temple hierarchy.¹³

However, others do not concur with this view. Avemarie compares the Baptist with the Qumran sectarians and contends that the ablutions are the only aspect that offers an alternative to the Temple, but they are not sufficient to incur active tension.¹⁴ Taylor believes there is no evidence for immersion as a substitution for sacrifice in Second Temple Judaism. She points to the call to repent in prophetic tradition, which is also not related to sacrifice.¹⁵

John draws on the immersion in water as a symbol for cleansing from sin (cf. Ezekiel 36:25). This, however, has nothing to do with sacrifices. Interestingly, the metaphoric equation of ritual immersion with sacrifices is attested to in a purification liturgy (4Q512) found in Qumran. Here the purpose of the immersion is both physical and moral purification, aimed at atonement. Sacrificial imagery appears in one of the blessings recited by the immersed person, addressing God: "[forgave me al]l sins and purified me from impure immodesty and atoned so that can enter[...] purification. And the blood of the *burnt offering agreeable to you [and the pl]ea[sa]nt (aroma) agreeable to You*".¹⁶ Here purification does not explicitly substituting sacrifice, yet the text does relate it to the aroma of burnt offering. Since the purpose of immersion and prayer in this liturgy is repentance from sin and attaining atonement, it is possible that in a certain sense ritual purification from sin take the place sacrificial rites.

¹² Webb 1991:192-193, 204-205, 211-212 (citations from pp. 204-205, 212). He infers that the Baptist condemns the priestly aristocracy, whose presence or actions defiled the Temple or invalidated its rites, but he does not condemn the actual Temple rites. Joseph 2016:104 follows Webb, and also suggests that John influences Jesus' "antipathy towards the Temple". Both are "alternative-temple movements" manifesting suspicion and hostility towards the Temple's current administration. Thomas 1935: esp. 55-56 has already suggested (based on the Church Fathers' evidence on Jewish sects) that ablutions sometimes take the place of sacrifices among certain groups. For assumptions about John the Baptist's priestly authority, see Strelan 2008:128-129.

¹³ Perrin 2010:38, 42-44. Becker 1998:43-44 even argues that John's baptism and the forgiveness of sins are a form of attack on the Temple cult.

¹⁴ Avemarie 1999. He thinks that John was perhaps indifferent to the Temple cult, but critical of Essene practices.

¹⁵ Taylor 1997:29-31, 108-109. Compare Isa 55:7. In Ps Sol 3:8 and 9:6 atonement is achieved by fasting and affliction or confession. She rejects Thomas' (1935) approach regarding Jewish Baptist movements that regard immersion as a substitution for sacrifices, and notes that in contrast to the Baptist groups described by the Church fathers, John's disciples do not practice repeated or daily ablutions.

¹⁶ 4Q512 frags. 29-32 vii 8-11; *DJD* 7, 265. See Regev 2016b:esp. 36-37.

In contrast, such a substitution is hardly implied in the gospels' tradition on John the Baptist, or in Christian Baptism in the NT. The first evidence for Baptism replacing sacrifices is to be found in the anti-Temple Pseudo Clementines *Recognitions* 1.39. It would be entirely wrong to attribute to John the Baptist ideas that were developed in second or third century Christianity. There is no reason to presuppose that there is direct tension between earliest Christianity and the Temple, and there is no evidence that Jesus inherited this approach from his teacher, the Baptist.

Jewish Attitudes towards the Temple

Almost every book on the Temple in NT scholarship begins with a long introduction on the Temple cult in ancient Judaism. There is no need to repeat it here. It is well known that in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple period sources the Temple is regarded as the link between heaven and earth, the navel of the world, it represents the entire cosmos and is the dwelling place of God's presence.¹⁷

Instead of pointing to the common Jewish attitude towards the Temple I prefer to introduce the diversity of Second Temple attitudes towards the Temple and the sacrificial cult. Focusing on the attitudes of four religious or social groups or schools – the traditional priests and the Sadducees, the Qumran sectarians, diaspora Jews, and the rabbis after the destruction of the Temple – illustrates the different ways in which the Temple was viewed. Even within these four general groupings (sometimes artificially defined, for the sake of a short introduction) one finds differences.

This survey provides background on early Christian contemporary attitudes towards the Temple, and shows some of the various alternatives Jesus and his followers have in approaching the cult.

Priestly Judaism and the Sadducees

It is natural to begin a survey of Jewish attitudes towards the Temple with priestly authors – Ben Sira (admittedly, his priestly descent remains uncertain) and Flavius Josephus. Jesus son of Elazar Ben Sira, writing in ca. 180 BCE, regards Aaron as the ideal religious leader (45:6-22). For Ben Sira, sacrifice evinces religious piety and commitment to the Law (35:1-2, 8). He stresses the need to honor the priest as a holy person because this is an integral element in worshipping God, and he calls upon the people to give the priests their dues (7:29-31). The

¹⁷ See for example Klawans 2006:114-123. See also the parallelism of the Temple and the Torah in 1 Mac 13:4; 14:29; 2 Mac 2:17; *Against Apion* 2.193-198; m. *Avot* 1:2. For a typology of holiness which relates to the cult, see Regev 2001.

"holy tent" is the dwelling place of the divine wisdom (24:10), and the Second Temple is designated for everlasting glory (49:12).

Josephus is proud that the Jews are scrupulous in preserving the purity and holiness of the Temple. He specifies the divisions into four courts, the regulations concerning the priestly duties, and the different taboos restricting persons and objects from the sacred area (*Against Apion* 2.102-109). He regards priestly devotion to the sacrificial cult as a supreme ideal (*War* 1.148, 150). For Josephus, the Temple should always be pure (for instance, Pompey purifies it after he enters the sancta, *War* 1.153). When accusing those who rebel against Rome and fight each other for control of the Temple Mount, Josephus displays sensitivity towards the Temple's pollution. He blames the rebels for killing innocent people in the holiest place of all, and using the sacred precincts for military purposes. This impurity is not only one of ritual (e.g., corpse impurity), it is mainly a moral issue: evil conduct defiles the cult.¹⁸

The Sadducees, one of the two leading religious movements along with their rivals, the Pharisees, maintained strict halakhic positions regarding purity, with special attention paid to the Temple. They also aimed to restrict laypeople from the sacred domain. For example, they rebuke the Pharisees for permitting the laity to touch and defile the Temple Menorah during the festival (t. *Hagigah* 3:35). They also emphasize the centrality of priesthood and the high priest in relation to the laity and sages. New Pharisaic cultic practices were rejected, such as the libation of water on the altar during the Feast of Tabernacles (t. *Sukkah* 3:16).

The high priests, most of whom are probably Sadducees, defend the sacredness of the Temple against Agrippa II and the Roman governors. Ishmael son of Phiabi and others of the high priestly class build a wall to prevent Agrippa II from watching the sacrificial cult from his palace, and even travel to Rome to obtain Nero's approval for this screening wall (*Ant.* 20.189-195).¹⁹

These priestly views regard the Temple cult as the heart of religious piety, and they are also proud of the extensive boundaries with which they have surrounded the sacred realm. One cannot, therefore, expect the Temple institutions to display religious tolerance.

Qumran I: Stringent Temple Law

Among the Dead Sea Scrolls found at Qumran are documents that reflect the views of secluded sects who reject the Temple, but there are also earlier scrolls, detailing the laws that formed the foundations of the Qumran movement. These scrolls – the Temple Scroll and

¹⁸ *War* 5.14-19. See also 5.397-402. For many other references and an analysis of Josephus' anti-rebel ideology, see Regev 2011; Regev 2014a.

¹⁹ On the Sadducees and the high priests, see Regev 2005a; 2006.

4QMMT (the halakhic letter called *Miqsat Ma'ase ha-Torah*) – discuss laws of purity and sacrifices. They demand a higher degree of scrupulousness in the practice of Temple rituals than those prescribed the Priestly Code in the Pentateuch and later rabbinic halakhah, since they adhere to a stricter interpretation of the laws of the Torah. These laws pertain to protecting the purity of the Temple from defiled persons, restrictions as to where priestly dues should be eaten, and how sacrifices should be offered (for example, it is prohibited to slaughter an animal outside the Temple, since any such slaughter is sacral and requires bringing portions of the animal to the altar). The Temple scroll also contains an extensive plan of the Temple courts which reflects the boundaries of sacred space, and also new rites of atonement and the festival calendar.

The authors of the Temple Scroll and MMT follow the theology of the so-called Priestly Code, but they augment the scope and intensity of its purity restrictions, ritual taboos and ceremonies of atonement. This rigorous pursuit of purity, sanctity and atonement derives from the idea that the sancta is extremely sensitive to threats of pollution and desecration, and any violation of cultic holiness imposes blame upon Israel, leading to divine wrath and punishment. Thus, one should keep away from impurity (*ta'arovet*) because one must “be full of reverence (*yere'im*) of the sanctuary” (MMT B 48-49). The authors are concerned with the risk that “the priests shall not cause the people to bear sin,” (MMT B 12-13, 26-27). If Josephus and the Sadducees are restrictive in their approach to the cult, these scrolls show that there are others who wish to be even stricter. Their authors pre-suppose a vulnerable, dynamic Temple holiness that is very susceptible to desecration. The cultic system, it appears, may be extremely sensitive.

Qumran II: Separation, Substitutions for Sacrifices and the Eschatological Temple

According to the so-called sectarian scrolls, the Qumran movement withdraws from Jewish society and does not participate in the Temple cult in Jerusalem. The Temple and its sacrifices are condemned because the Jewish leaders, who are morally corrupt and defiled, pollute the Temple cult. In *Pesher Habbakuk* the authors accuse the Hasmonean high priest and leader, “the Wicked Priest,” saying that he was “arrogant, [had] abandoned God, and [had] betrayed the laws for the sake of wealth. He stole and amassed the wealth of men of violence who had rebelled against God, and he took the wealth of people to add himself guilty of sin. And abominated ways he practiced with every sort of unclean impurity.” The Wicked Priest was also accused of having “committed abominable deeds and [having] defiled God’s Sanctuary. He stole the wealth of the poor ones.”²⁰ In the Damascus Document (CD 6:11–17) the sect's

²⁰ 1QpHab 8:8–13; 12:7–10 (*pesher* on Hab 2:17). Translation follows Horgan 1979.

members are called to refrain from impure dedications and the wealth of the Temple, because of the wicked social conduct of "the sons of the pit" towards the poor, widows and orphans.

It appears that the Qumran sectarians refrain from worshipping in the Temple in Jerusalem. This is probably the reason why they develop substitutes for the sacrificial cult. In the Community Rule, the authors proclaim that moral behavior and prayer can replace atoning sacrifice. "The perfect of the way" performed by the *yahad* serves as an offering which pleases God (1QS 9:3–5).²¹ In the penal code of the Damascus Document the authors link communal punishment with the sacrifices of atonement and purgation of sin at the altar. The punished transgressor should accept his punishment and feel remorse, as if he is bringing atoning sacrifices to the altar.²²

In several scrolls the Temple is mentioned in relation to eschatological events. The War Rule (elaborating the war of the Sons of light against the Sons of Darkness) envisions that after the first phase of the eschatological war with the *kittyim* (Seleucids or Romans) and other neighboring enemies, the priests and the elders of Israel will return to the Temple and offer sacrifices "in order to prepare the pleasant incense for God's approval, to atone for all His congregation and to satisfy themselves in perpetuity before Him at the table of glory."²³ For the Qumran sectarians this means that the Temple plays an important role in their plans and dreams for the future. 4Q Florilegium, an exegesis on the End of Days, mentions the eschatological hope for "the house which [He will establish] for [Him] in the last days". It seems that this Temple, which will be established by God's own hands (following Ex 15:17), will not be entered by foreigners and they will not desolate it as happened before.²⁴ The Temple Scroll 29:9-10 mentions the sanctuary which God himself will establish on "the day of creation." Both passages attest to a miraculous foundation of the eschatological Temple.

Evidence from Qumran indicates that purity and sacredness are not merely a matter of legal conduct and bodily immersion. Morality and social values also play a critical role in the Temple. The Qumran sectarians are harshly critical of the Temple leadership. They refrain from the cult and establish substitutions for sacrifices not because they do not care for the Temple, but because they care too much. Their dualistic worldview, sectarian separation and quest for immediate atonement lead them to seek new cultic avenues. Nevertheless, they were

²¹ For prayer as a substitute for sacrifices, see also CD 11:20–21. On 1QS 9:3–5, see in Chapter 2.

²² 4QD^e 7 I 15-17 and the parallel in 4QD^a 11 1-3. For a broader discussion of moral purity and atonement in Qumran, see Regev 2003; Regev 2007:95-132. Note that Josephus says that the Essenes send only votive offerings to the Temple since they were barred from the Temple and performed their sacrifices "by themselves" (*Ant.* 18:19). According to Philo, they do not offer animal sacrifices at all (*Quod Omnis Probus Liber sit* 75).

²³ 1QM 2:1-6 (citation from lines 5-6).

²⁴ 4Q174 Florilegium frags. 1 I, 21, 2, lines 3-6.

waiting to return to the Temple on their own terms and believed that an eschatological Temple structure would descend from the skies at the End of Days. Paradoxically, their intense interest in the Temple draws them away from it, and raises their expectations for the future. It is sometime assumed that the Qumran sectarians had some degree of influence on the early Christians. Current scholarship, however, usually rejects the possibility that the NT authors were directly affected or even aware of these scrolls.²⁵

Diaspora Judaism

It is sometimes assumed that the Jews of the Diaspora had less of an interest in the Temple. Due to their distance from Jerusalem, the influence of Hellenism and the need for more accessible religious modes, they found alternatives such as prayer.²⁶ The evidence, however, shows otherwise. Jews from the Greco-Roman world donate money to the Temple, especially the annual half-shekel tribute. This is an act of identification with the Temple cult.²⁷ Furthermore, several Jewish writers from Egypt show interest in and even admiration for the Temple.

Aristeas' letter to Philocrates (*Pseudo-Aristeas*), which purports to tell the story of the translation of the Torah into Greek in Alexandria, was written during the second century BCE, probably in Alexandria. Aristeas describes his journey to Jerusalem to bring back qualified translators, including a detailed description of the Temple and its holy vessels (83-106). Much attention is paid to the altar, the manner in which the veil is moved by the wind, the priestly vestments, and the priestly service. The sacrificial cult arouses astonishment, wonder and marvel in the eyes of the beholder (*Ps. Arist.* 84-99). Aristeas praises the high priest Elazar for his integrity, reputation and honor, as the supreme authority in matters pertaining to the Torah.²⁸

2 Maccabees, written by Jason of Cyrenaica in the mid-second BCE, places the Temple at the heart of the narrative. The official subject of the book is "the purification of the greatest Temple and the rededication of the altar" (2 Macc 2:19). The Temple is mentioned 40 times in the entire book and the festival of Hanukkah, celebrating the purification of the Temple, plays an important role (2 Macc 10:1-8). The narrative depicts the threats and attacks

²⁵ Bauckham 2003; Regev 2007:26 and references.

²⁶ E.g., Schwartz 1997. One of his arguments is the prioritization of the "nation" upon the Temple in 2 Mac 5:19.

²⁷ Cicero *Pro Flacco* 28:67; *Ant.* 14.227 (donations from Ephesus); Philo, *Leg.* 156-157, 216, 291, 313-316. Josephus mentions 800 talents of the Jews' public money, held on the island of Cos (*Ant.* 14.110-118, citing Strabo). See also Regev 2013:73-78.

²⁸ Regev 2013:84-89. On Elazar, see *Ps. Aristeas*, 3, 11, 32-33, 38, 46, 121, 123, 126, 128, 170, 320.

on the Temple and stressed that Judah Maccabee strives to defend the Temple and its sanctity. The Maccabees demonstrate piety towards the Temple. For instance, they utter a prayer at the Temple altar before going into battle (2 Macc 10:26).²⁹

In the Third Sibylline Oracle, that dates back to the second century BCE, reverence to God is manifested by offering sacrifices at the Jerusalem Temple. Worship at the true Temple is a necessary requirement for salvation. The Greeks are also told to bring gifts to the Jewish Temple.³⁰ The Fifth Sibylline Oracle, written between 70 CE and the reign of Hadrian, complains bitterly about the destruction of the Temple despite Israel's piety, and also envisions the rebuilding of the Temple.³¹

Philo's treatment of the Temple cult is extensive and complex. There are more than 100 references to the Temple in his writings.³² His comments on the Law and the Torah include the necessity of sacrifice.³³ He praises sacrifice as a proper means for worship, representing righteousness and praise of God.³⁴ For Philo, sacrifice has moral symbolism, such as humility before God. He believes that God is not interested in the sacrificed animals but rather in the pure spirit of the sacrifice.³⁵

²⁹ Regev 2013:89-93.

³⁰ 3 *Sib Or* 3.545-572; (the gifts are brought in 715-731). The Temple is also mentioned in relation to the eschatological scenario in 657-808. On the significance of the Temple in *Sib Or* 3, see Collins 1972:37-38, 44-47. Collins associates the author with the Temple of Onias IV in Leontopolis (*ibid.*, 52-53).

³¹ Complaints: *Sib Or* 5. 398-413; Collins 1972:94-95. Rebuilding: *Sib Or* 5.493-511. The destruction is mentioned in 408-413. In contrast, the Fourth Sibylline Oracle rejects the very notion of the Temple. *Sib Or* 4.5-12 is a polemic against idolatry, but also declares (8) that God "does not have a house, stone set up as a temple". Lines 24-34 list the virtue of the rejection of all temples and altars and of blood sacrifices. Not merely pagan cults are rejected, but also a Jewish one (Collins 1974:367-368), since no positive approach to any Temple is expressed, and the Jewish one is neglected. Collins 1974:367-368, 378-380 attributes this text to a post-70 CE Jewish Baptist group and concluded that it developed the rejection of all temples as a reaction to the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple.

³² Fuglseth 2005:193-194.

³³ *QE* 2.50; Heir 123. He also mentions pilgrimage to Jerusalem and the temple tax. See Fuglseth 2005:196-200. Philo has a practical interest in the Temple cult. His personal pilgrimage is mentioned in Prov. 2.64. See Fuglseth 2005:193-195, 218-219 (on the authenticity of this passage which is quoted from Eusebius, see *ibid.*, 195 n. 22). He also notes that the Jews recognize each other when visiting the Temple, and pilgrimage unites them as a nation (*Spec.* 1.68-70).

³⁴ *Spec.* 1.272-272

³⁵ *Spec.* 1.293-294; 1.277, respectively.

Philo is well-known for his spiritualization of the Temple and sacrifice.³⁶ He argues that the soul is the true house or Temple of God.³⁷ He also introduces a cosmological understanding of the cult. Heaven, or the entire cosmos, is a Temple.³⁸ Still, humans need the earthly Temple in order to worship and access God.³⁹ Cultic objects in the Temple, such as the high priest's vestments, represent the cosmos.⁴⁰ Thus, Philo uses the allegorical method to seek the ultimate meaning of the Temple. Using symbolic allegorical interpretation he makes a transference of visible phenomenon, applying a Platonic dialectical method (in which there is an ontological dualism between the empirical and ideal worlds), deducing from the specific to the universal or cosmic categories.⁴¹

The fundamental question, therefore, is where does Philo's heart lie? Does he adhere to the practical aspects of the cult or merely admire its symbolism? Goodenough concludes that while Philo is loyal to the literal commands, he is mainly attached to the sacramental or ritualistic symbolism, the philosophy it invokes. What he finds appealing in the cult is not its underlying idea, but its emotional and aesthetic association.⁴² Nonetheless, Philo's allegoric interpretation of sacrifice is not at the expense of adherence to the Jerusalem Temple.⁴³ Philo seeks the true meaning of sacrifice without discrediting its importance for religious life.⁴⁴

Philo's twofold approach is important for assessing the use of the Temple and sacrifices as an analogy, as is found in Paul's in cultic metaphors. Using the cult to represent something else does not necessarily deprive the basic practical aspects of their value. It makes more sense that appreciation of the Temple and sacrifices leads the author to develop their symbolism in new religious messages.

Multiple textual evidence from Hellenistic-Egyptian Judaism shows the immense impact of the Temple on Jews living outside of Judaea. They feel committed to the sacrificial

³⁶ Nikiprowetzky 1967.

³⁷ *Cher.* 99-101; *Somn.* 1.149, 215; *Heir* 75; Fugelseth 2005:208-212. When God created Adam, he made a sacred Temple for the soul (*Opif.* 137). The gathering of Israel in the wilderness before the erection of the Tabernacle is "the home of the Temple and altar" (*QE* 1:10).

³⁸ Heaven: *Opif.* 55. Cosmos: *Somn.* 1.215.

³⁹ *Spec.* 1.66-67; Fugelseth 2005:208.

⁴⁰ *Spec.* 1.84-96; *Somn.* 1.214 (breastplate). On the cosmic symbolism of the Temple objects and the high priest's garments, see Goodenough 1935:113-116.

⁴¹ Fugelseth 2005:203-206.

⁴² Goodenough 1935:84.

⁴³ Nikiprowetzky 1967. The analogy of the soul as a temple does not diminish the relevance of the Jerusalem Temple. See Fugelseth 2005:209-210.

⁴⁴ Gilders 2011. Gilders notes, for example, that in *Spec.* 1.167 animal sacrifices serve as a symbolic means for teaching religious perfection.

system and also regard the Temple as the symbolic center of Jewish religion. The Temple defines their identity, especially when they annually contribute money for its upkeep. Can this also be applied to the early Christians in Syria, Asia Minor, Greece and Rome?

Rabbinic Approaches to the Temple after 70 CE

The early rabbis share this common Jewish appreciation and devotion to the Temple. A large portion of their halakhah pertains to the sacrificial system. For instance, the earliest layers of rabbinic literature regards pilgrimage as the essence of the festivals, with the emphasis on visits to the Temple, sacrifices, and special rites.⁴⁵ After the destruction of the Temple, it is difficult for certain rabbis to come to terms with its loss. R. Yeshua mentions that some rabbis intend to continue to offer sacrifices without the Temple (m. *Eduyot* 8:6.), while others pray for its restoration (m. *Pesahim* 10:6).⁴⁶

The rabbis also employ Temple symbolism in everyday life. For instance, in their discourse relating to the practices of the festival of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*), some laws pertaining to building the domestic *sukkah* relate to it as a Temple.⁴⁷ The commandment regarding the four species on this festival is perceived as building an altar (b. *Sukkah* 45a), and they should be without blemish, like animal sacrifices (b. *Sukkah* 35a). Waving the four species is even listed along with explicit cultic practices.⁴⁸

Rabbinic sources testify to several substitutes for the Temple cult after 70 CE. Giving charity, as an act of commitment to the Law, replaced of some festival sacrifices, and according R. Yohanan b. Zakkai, the leader of the rabbis after 70 CE, it even atones for sins.⁴⁹ He also maintains that good deeds (*gmilut hasadim*) atone for sins in place of sacrifices.⁵⁰ Prayers are instituted to replace sacrifices, and they are sometimes even regarded as superior

⁴⁵ Henshke 2007. On the Pharisees' approach to the Temple cult and the priesthood, see Regev 2005a.

⁴⁶ 2 Baruch, written several years after the destruction, expresses grief for the loss of the Temple. 2 Bar 10:18 argues that the priests should throw the Temple's keys to the sky in order that God will guard the Temple since they have failed in doing so. The author proposes two ways of coping with the destruction: Recognition that it is a punishment for sins, and a new view of the Temple in which heavenly Jerusalem shifts attention away from the destruction, since heaven is the true dwelling place of God. See Murphy 1987:671, 675, 681-683. On the heavenly Temple, see Lee 2001:146-157, and the discussion in Chapter 7. The true Temple was therefore not destroyed and could not be destroyed.

⁴⁷ B. *Sukkah* 5b; y. *Sukkah* 1, 52b; Nagen 2013:44-53.

⁴⁸ M. *Menahot* 3:5-6; Nagen 2013:83-93, 98-99.

⁴⁹ Sifre *Re'eh* 143 (ed. Finkelstein, 196); Henshke 2007:50-56. Charity atones: b. *Bava Batra* 10b (cf. already Dan 4:24; Tobit 12:9).

⁵⁰ *Avot de-Rabbi Nathan*, version A 4 (ed. Shechter, 21).

to offerings. Prayer and the study of the Torah are termed *'avoda*, like the sacrificial cult.⁵¹ Another substitution is the heavenly Temple. This concept is developed in latter rabbinic literature, and the sage Rav (ca. 250 CE) already mentions that the angel Michael offers sacrifices on the altar in heaven (b. *Menahot* 110a).

For the early rabbis, Torah and the rabbinic ethos replace the Temple cult. The rabbis fill the vacuum left by the Temple, seeking substitutes for the precepts associated with the Temple. The sages and their teachings are regarded as analogous to the Temple, in order to justify and enhance their claim of religious authority.⁵² They believe that "two who are sitting (together) and words of the Torah pass between them – the Divine presence (*shekhinah*) resides between them" (m. *Avot* 3:2). The (study of the) Torah is regarded as more sacred than the Temple vessels.⁵³ R. Simeon b. Yohai (ca. 140 CE) says that for God, the words of the Torah (as studied by the sages) are more precious than burnt offerings and sacrifices.⁵⁴ It is even claimed that the study of the Torah atones for sin (b. *Rosh ha-Shana* 18a).

For the post-70 CE rabbis, the sage is comparable to the Temple: "the Sons of Torah are atonement for the world."⁵⁵ They also act accordingly in regulating their religious institutions. For instance, the rabbinic court at Yavneh assumes the status of the Temple in regard to festival ceremonies.⁵⁶ The laws pertaining to sacrifice which describe the cult in legal terms actually permit the Jews to experience the cult through its laws. While the Temple cannot be regained, it can at least be remembered in the vivid detail supplied by the sages.⁵⁷

Rabbinic literature illustrates the intriguing dynamics of cherishing the Temple cult while also developing substitutes for it. The role and status of the early rabbis are based on their claim that the study of the Torah comes in place of the Temple. They are able to commemorate and replace the Temple at one and the same time. This substitution does not necessarily attest to a lack of appreciation, although it does reflect the cultural transformation of values and social norms.

This survey of attitudes towards the Temple during a period roughly contemporary with the composition of the NT texts may be helpful in assessing early Christian treatments of

⁵¹ T. *Berakhot* 3:1; b. *Berakhot* 32b; Siferi *'Ekev* 41 (ed. Finkelstein, 87-88).

⁵² Rosenfeld 1997.

⁵³ Sifrei, *Eeqv* 48 (ed. Finkelstein, 114); Rosenfeld 1997:447-448.

⁵⁴ *Avot de Rabbi Nathan* version B, 8 (ed. Shechter 22). The early Amoraim (ca. 250 CE) state that the study of the Torah is more important than daily sacrifices. See b. *Eruvib* 63b; b. *Shabbat* 30; Rosenfeld 1997:462-463.

⁵⁵ T. *Bava Kama* 7:6; Rosenfeld 1997: 440-441 dates this to R. Yohana b. Zakkai (ca. 80 CE).

⁵⁶ M. *Rosh ha-Shanah* 4:1; Rosenfeld 1997:442.

⁵⁷ Neusner 1979:125-127. See, e.g. b. *Menahot* 110a.

the Temple theme. These include observance and restriction, admiration and commemoration, criticism and replacement. One attitude I have not been able to trace in Second Temple Judaism is a total rejection of the Temple cult as unnecessary. It will be interesting to seek such a view in the early Christian sources.

In this regard, it is necessary to comment on the Greco-Roman aspects of temples and cults, since many ancient readers of the NT texts, and perhaps even some of their authors, had some experience of them before electing to believe in the one and only God of Israel and Jesus Christ. Working on the relevant passages, I discovered that they are based on the Jewish symbolic world and at times aim to displace a sense of pagan cults from the mind of their readers. I fail to see positive traces of Greco-Roman cults in the relevant passages discussed in this book.

By this point one may already have sensed that my perspective is fundamentally Jewish. This requires clarification. In theory, the Jewish perspective should be balanced by relating NT Temple discourse to Greco-Roman temples and to religion in general. However, my reading of the texts reveals only slight if any relevance of the non-Jewish cultic world. Surely the evangelists, Paul and the author of Revelation, were aware of their cultic environment and the background of their Gentile readers. Yet I could not find clear allusions to Greco-Roman cults. Their discourse and thinking is entirely Jewish. It seems that they do not attempt to imitate or borrow from pagan cults. To the contrary, in addressing non-Jewish audiences they seek to draw their Gentile readers away from the pagan religious landscape (see Chapter 2).

Method of Research: The Plain Text and Basic Classification

My basic literary approach to the NT texts is that they reflect their authors' intent: the text simply embodies the author's consciousness and agenda.⁵⁸ Some chapters are a commentary on relevant passages from each gospel or epistle. I believe that the words of the authors speak for themselves, hence reading the text, and not merely alluding to it, is the first step for a thorough interpretation.

Examining the various treatments of the Temple theme in the New Testament demands religious and historical sensitivity. One needs to pay attention to the meaning of rituals, symbols, and the diverse perspectives and approaches to those cultic acts and symbols in first century Judaism. Different NT authors perceive certain aspects of the Temple in very different ways. As I have already mentioned, the most basic step is to distinguish between the Temple as an institution and the Temple as a symbol. The latter is of course more flexible and advances a variety of approaches.

⁵⁸ On this approach, see Eagleton 1983:50-60.

In order to classify and interpret the vast corpus of NT material related to the Temple, I divide it into four categories: participation, analogy, criticism, and rejection. *Participation* texts present the Temple as the center of Judaism. We see this, for example, in those passages in gospels and Acts that describe Jesus and the apostles attending the Temple on a regular basis. Do these narratives imply that the Temple was a legitimate and highly relevant institution, one that merited the attention and respect of pre-70 CE Christians? *Analogy* texts draw parallels between believers and the Temple/priests/sacrifices triumvirate. This kind of Temple imagery — on display, among other works, in Paul — builds on the Temple's symbolism (i.e., holiness, religious devotion) in order to inject a *new* sense of sacredness into the early-Christian community. *Criticism* texts, such as Jesus' "cleansing" of the Temple (Mark 11:15-17 and par.), are an attempt to restore the original status of the cult, not to altogether refute the idea of an earthly Temple. And finally, *rejection* texts assert that Jesus in effect replaces the Temple cult (or the high priest), such as in Hebrews. It will be interesting to see to what extent rejection of the Temple cult can be discerned elsewhere in the NT.

The study of the Temple in early Christianity is closely linked to the attitude towards the Jewish Law, the observance of Halakhah. We need not link them too closely, since the Temple theme is not only a matter of legal observance, but also represents religious devotion and identity (and even Gentiles may attend it). Still, when discussing each NT text, it is necessary to examine its more general approach to Judaism, or at least to the question of Jewish vs. Gentile identity, and the best marker for this is the author's approach to the Law.

My discussion will go beyond the question of whether early-Christian attitudes toward the Temple were in favor of or hostile to the sacrificial cult. Rather, I intend to show that in discussing the Temple, the NT authors were negotiating their relationship with the institutional and symbolic center of Judaism, as well as with their own Jewishness.