

# Jesus, the "Hellenists" and the Jerusalem Temple: Historical and Theological Issues<sup>1</sup>

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## 1. Basic Issues

The question of the relationship of Jesus or the Hellenists to the Jerusalem temple is usually thought of in terms of various "criticisms", that is, criticism of the temple, the cult, or the sacrificial system. Let us thus first try to come to terms with these "critical" categories, categories which are regularly applied to the relevant biblical texts both for historical questions (stretching from the Old Testament to early Christianity) as well as for theological questions (for example, eschatology and soteriology). However, it should be mentioned at the outset that our topic raises a particular methodological challenge, namely that both in relation to Jesus as well as the Hellenists we have here to do with historical-theological positions and issues that have to be reconstructed on the basis of and out from behind the texts of the New Testament (primarily the gospels and Acts). Thus, our reconstructions necessarily remain hypothetical. Nevertheless, a theological history of early Christianity cannot forgo the attempt.

I begin with the presupposition that "temple criticism" can either relate to the building itself or to the cultic practice connected with it. Both of these aspects are subject to the *fundamental* critique that the temple and its cult do not (or no longer) correspond to the nature of God or the nature of humanity's relationship to God. This can lead either to a relativizing of the temple or to a conscious adherence to the temple despite criticism of it; in any case, criticism does not necessarily lead to demands for the elimination of the temple or its cult (classic examples are 1 Kings 8:27 and Isa 66:1-2). And criticism most certainly does not put an end to theologizing about the temple and its cult.<sup>2</sup> This is all the more important to consider – and this is usually overlooked in the literature – as "cultic practice" includes not only sacrifices but also prayer. Prayer is never the object of a fundamental cult criticism, yet it can be positioned against the sacrificial cult. Prayer and worship of God are also the main tasks of the angels in the heavenly temple, which are the heavenly patterns of the earthly temple and (sacrificial) cult.

Even if the divisions are blurry – and that goes for the interpretation of ambivalent texts, and even more so for historical realities – we can distinguish a second form of criticism of the temple and cult. This form is directed not toward temple and cult in principle but to objectionable practice associated with the temple. That is, human beings defile and desecrate the temple and make the sacrificial cult ineffectual and the prayers worthless. This can lead to a far-reaching questioning of the entire cultic practice (classic examples are Isa 1:10-17;

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<sup>1</sup> For translation help and content discussion I thank my assistant Dr. Phillip A. Davis.

<sup>2</sup> The best example is Rev 21:3, 16: The holy city, which no longer needs a temple (v. 22a), takes the place of the temple itself. Nevertheless, the city is the dwelling place of God with humanity (just as the temple) and takes on the oversized cubic form of the Holy of Holies in Solomon's temple (the closest parallel is 2 Bar. 59:4: The likeness of Zion with its measurements was to be made after the likeness of the present sanctuary). Metaphorically, however, God and the Lamb themselves may be called the temple of the new Jerusalem (v. 22b). Its point of contrast would then be less the Temple of Jerusalem than the present heavenly temple, which will no longer exist in the new heaven and the new Jerusalem. See Peter Söllner, *Jerusalem, die hochgebaute Stadt: Eschatologisches und Himmlisches Jerusalem im Frühjudentum und im frühen Christentum*, TANZ 25 (Tübingen: Francke, 1998), 224-239, 256-261.

Amos 5:21-27), and all effort must be given to renewing human practice.<sup>3</sup> Since these efforts will not succeed in perpetuity, a different, better set of practices or a different temple must (either now or in the future) take the place of the current one. We may recall here, on the one hand, the self-conception of the Qumran community, as reflected in some of its important texts (e.g., 4Q174 III 6-7; 1QS VIII 5.8-9; IX 6; XI 8)<sup>4</sup>; and on the other hand, that in early Judaism eschatological hope was regularly placed on the reconstitution and renewal of the Jerusalem temple (e.g., Jub. 1:17, 27; 25:21; 1 En. 91:13; 93:7; 4Q174 III 2-4).<sup>5</sup> The terms “renewal” and “reconstitution” clearly signal that the old is not fundamentally objectionable, but only that it is tainted and thus can and should be revived (e.g., Mal 3:1-6: purification of the temple staff, removal of the unjust). This, however, does imply that that which is renewed can be of an absolutely different quality than that which came before (e.g., Jub. 1:29; 11QT XXIX 9-10: new creation, new temple), and the new can also involve new aspects. Indeed, it can even “replace” the old, if the old can no longer be “reformed”.

## 2. *The Temple Incident*

Let us begin by probing the pericope of Jesus’ so-called cleansing of the temple in its four differing parallel versions.

a) The most succinct and clear text for our inquiry is Luke 19:45-46. Luke contrasts the sellers in the temple with the temple itself as a “house of prayer”; whoever does business in the temple makes it into a “den of robbers”, thus profaning the temple through immoral activity, or at least activity contradicting cultic practice. This is the classic “temple cleansing” in the proper sense: Jesus is trying to reconstitute the religious significance and function of the temple, at the very least in a one-time, figurative manner. Hence, *ἔσται* in verse 46 is not a temporal, but a volitive future (“and my house *shall* be a house of prayer”) that provides a timeless definition of the temple.

The most obvious differences in the parallel texts are that the other accounts, first, mention sacrificial animals and their buyers, and second, they narrate Jesus’ actions against the moneychangers, whose activity was necessary for the sacrificial cult. Thus, we have before us texts that, as alluded to above, remain ambivalent about the temple: Some find in them not only a necessary “cleansing” of the temple, but also a fundamental criticism of the temple and the sacrificial cult by Jesus. However, in my opinion, the gospel texts do not yield this result in and of themselves, because all four end with either “den of robbers” or “house of trade” as their climax, betraying the main point of the passages.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Otto Kaiser, *Das Buch des Propheten Jesaja: Kapitel 1-12*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., ATD 17 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 47 on Isa 1: “Nothing shows more clearly than the mention of prayer in God’s rebuff that the entire section is not concerned with the fundamental rejection of cultic piety, but it rather constitutes a rejection based on a given set of circumstances” [translation mine].

<sup>4</sup> But see the justified reservations of Peter Wick, *Die urchristlichen Gottesdienste: Entstehung und Entwicklung im Rahmen der frühjüdischen Tempel-, Synagogen- und Hausfrömmigkeit*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., BWANT 150 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2003), 146-155: The community cannot really want to be a substitute for the temple and its cult because of its self-image that is positively related to the temple in Jerusalem. – Timothy Wardle describes three ways in which the Qumran “sectarians” dealt with their separation from the Jerusalem temple: “First, they looked forward to a new, renewed temple. Second, they turned their minds to the heavenly temple and cult. Third, they viewed their community as a replacement for the temple” (*The Jerusalem Temple and Early Christian Identity*, WUNT II/291 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010], 150).

<sup>5</sup> The “new house” of 1 En. 90:29-36, often referred to in this context, does not refer to a new temple, but to the eschatological Jerusalem. The point is “that an immediate gathering of God and the inhabitants is coming, which is why no separate temple building is envisaged” (Söllner, *Jerusalem*, 42; translation mine).

b) John, in 2:13-22, expresses this point most plainly. He forgoes the references to Isa 56:7 and Jer 7:11 found in the other gospels, and by his use of the non-pejorative “house of trade” he emphasizes that even if the temple activity is not immoral (as implied by “den of robbers”), commerce is incompatible with the holiness of the temple. The continuation of the pericope, which has to do with the question of Jesus’ underlying authority for his zealous actions, changes nothing about this main point. Here Jesus first (seemingly) calls for the destruction of the temple and announces its rebuilding in three days. Though the text switches to a different level of discourse in discussing the death and resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and thereby adds an extra dimension to the understanding of the temple (Jesus’ body is also a temple), none of that ultimately changes the meaning of verses 14 to 16.

c) Matthew’s account in 21:12-13 contains the same (shorter) form of the Isaiah quotation as Luke, and it too could be understood as a timeless claim: My house *shall be called* “House of Prayer”, and so it *shall be*! Despite the portrayal in verse 12, the scene does not depict a fundamental criticism of the sacrificial cult, but only a criticism of its commercialization. Elsewhere Matthew never criticizes cultic or ritual regulations in themselves; rather he merely relativizes their importance (12:5-8; 23:23). And the statement, “I desire mercy and not sacrifice” (12:7) is undoubtedly to be understood to mean that sacrifice may and shall be made when there is mercy and reconciliation (5:23-24).<sup>6</sup> An eschatological temple or a renewed temple in the eschaton is not envisaged by Matthew. The temple plays neither a role at present nor in the future for non-Jewish peoples (thus the omission of “for all peoples” from Mark in Mt 21:13).

d) The most important difference in Mark (11:15-17) compared to Matthew and Luke is the complete quotation of Isa 56:7b (including “for all peoples”). It is here in Mark’s account that Jesus is most likely predicting, and figuratively illustrating, an eschatological opening of the Jerusalem temple as “House of Prayer” without sacrificial cult and without ritual objects (vv. 15-16) for non-Jews in light of the expanding world-wide Gentile mission. In this respect verse 17 envisions, as does Isa 56:7, a temporally future, eschatological temple (κληθήσεται “will be called”). But, it must not be forgotten that precisely the “house of prayer” in Isa 56:7 is also a place that welcomes foreigners to bring sacrifices to Jahweh’s altar (56:6; cf. also 60:7 LXX)! On any account, the inclusion of Gentiles depicted by the symbolic cleansing and reconstitution of the temple (the elimination of the “den of robbers”) represents also a new element for the future. And for Mark Jesus anticipates this by means of his symbolic act in the temple (presumably in the court of Gentiles).<sup>7</sup> (In this respect, the future tense in verse 17 implies a certain mandate for Jesus: namely, to see to it that the temple can become the house of prayer for all peoples.)

*Conclusion:* It cannot necessarily be derived from the texts discussed here that Jesus fundamentally opposed the temple and its (sacrificial) cult in themselves.<sup>8</sup> This would only be possible if we were reconstructing an overall picture of Jesus, which would require the consultation of further texts. But there are not many other such texts to consider. Texts proclaiming a future destruction (Mk 13:1-2 par.; cf. Lk 19:43-44 [the city includes the temple]), or God’s departure from the temple (Lk 13:35 || Mt 23:38)<sup>9</sup> are not fitted for that

<sup>6</sup> Also that which is μερίζον in 12:6 is ζῆλος (Ulrich Luz, *Das Evangelium nach Matthäus: 2. Teilband: Mt 8-17*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., EKK I/2 [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener 1995], 231-32).

<sup>7</sup> More specifically, in the royal portico of the Herodian temple; see J. Adna, *Jerusalem Tempel und Tempelmarkt im 1. Jahrhundert n. Chr.*, ADPV 25 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1999).

<sup>8</sup> But now see Simon J. Joseph, *Jesus and the Temple: The Crucifixion in its Jewish Context*, SNTSMS 165 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2016).

<sup>9</sup> The “one coming in the name of the Lord” (Ps 118:26) is none other than the (returning) messiah, though here he is not coming into his temple (cf. the sequence in Mk 11:9-11), but to judge at his parousia.

question, because these are mostly punitive actions resulting from antecedent wrongdoing (such as the rejection of Jesus or disobedience; classic examples are Jer 7 and 26: Jeremiah's temple oracle). Thus, in these texts, it is human beings who receive criticism, but not the temple or the cult *per se*. It can indeed be assumed that the temple had a place in Jesus' notion of the coming kingdom of God.

### 3. *The Temple-Logion of Jesus*

Another possible case of temple criticism on the part of Jesus is the logion that arises during his trial (Mk 14:58 and parallels). If we take the logion on its own and investigate it in terms of our current interests, then we observe the following: First, the logion is not concerned in itself with criticism of the temple, but rather with the authority of Jesus – this is particularly clear in Mt 26:61 (δύναμαι) and explicit in John 2:18-19 (the demand for a sign, here in connection with the temple incident). This is also evident where the logion is taken up again in Mk 15:29-32 and Mt 27:40-43, which concern Jesus' power or powerlessness to save himself from the cross. Moreover, in every case (with the exception of Acts 6:14 [see below]) the logion has to do not only with the destruction, but at the same time also with the rebuilding of the temple within three days – the temple or the idea of the temple as such is thus not rejected in the logion. However, in Mark the reader can perceive some critical distance with respect to the existing temple, and in John the same thing is noticeable: The temple, being “made with hands”, does not satisfy God's requirements for humanity's relation to him, and therefore it will be replaced with an eschatological temple not made with hands. Or, in the case of John, the temple is rivaled and at least surpassed by the temple of Jesus' body (Joh 2:21). Both of these cases deal with discontinuity and a new, different quality between the old and new temples.<sup>10</sup> In Mark there are, moreover, two possible variations of the same notion: The “conservative” variation figures on the rebuilding of the Jerusalem temple by God himself or by his messiah (thus “not made with [human] hands”); the “liberal” variation figures, by contrast, on the end of a building entirely. If Mark knew a tradition like that of 1 Corinthians 3:16-17 (the community as the temple of God), then Mark's notion of the eschatological temple would point to the post-Easter community. We might be able to attribute the first variation to Jesus, but probably not the second. The “liberal” variation is also beset by certain problems: Why does the logion not read “after three days” or “on the third day”? And what is meant by the temple made with hands? (The temple is, after all, not yet at this post-Easter point destroyed, as the logion actually would require according to this interpretation.)<sup>11</sup>

Finally, one must consider that only in John is this logion construed as actually having been spoken by Jesus. For Mark and Matthew, the logion is the substance of a false testimony brought against Jesus (Luke does not use a comparable logion until he narrates Stephen being brought before the same Sanhedrin, where the saying is likewise a false testimony against him). What does this mean for the intention of the texts and for the question of the authenticity of the logion?

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<sup>10</sup> In John this is further supported by 7:38-39, where a predication about the eschatological temple in Ezek 27 is transferred to believers. Cf. also John 4:21-24. It is no longer about an actual building. In Mark this difference in quality applies even if the qualification “(not) made with hands” was not part of the oldest logion (as it likely was not; see Kurt Paesler, *Das Tempelwort Jesu: Die Traditionen von Tempelzerstörung und Tempelneuerung im Neuen Testament*, FRLANT 184 [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999], 121-22, 185, 228).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G.R. Beasley-Murray, R.W.N. Hoare, and J.K. Riches (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 126 n.1.

That it is not a false testimony in John but an actual statement of Jesus strongly suggests its authenticity (even if the saying is there newly interpreted theologically): Apparently the logion was handed down at some point in some form as an authentic saying of Jesus. Moreover, there are reasons why Mark and Matthew make the saying a false testimony or construe it as not going back to Jesus himself: Jesus should not be associated with any notions of violence or destruction that would bring to mind a militaristic Davidic Messiah or zealotry (Matthew emphasizes only the capability of violent force: “I can destroy” [26:61]; in Mark the saying still reads “I will destroy” [14:58]; cf. the critical position toward Davidic sonship in Mk 12:35-37).<sup>12</sup> Jesus has neither anything to do with the actual destruction of the temple nor anything to do with other eschatological events of war. Only once such things have passed will he return (from heaven). What speaks for the authenticity of the logion (in whatever wording) is that it rather contradicts Jesus’ otherwise peaceful activities, as does the fact that the literal, militaristic sense of the saying did not actually materialize and yet it was preserved. But, if the evangelists are primarily concerned with distancing Jesus from the aspect of destruction, this raises an interesting question methodologically: Does Mark want to characterize the whole saying for his readers as misconstrued or as attributed falsely to Jesus (as Matthew apparently wants to do),<sup>13</sup> or does he offer a positive message and an indeed accurate statement for those “who have ears to hear”? That is, does he want to convey a sort of double message that is declared to be false, but yet is partially true?<sup>14</sup> For example: Jesus may not have wanted to destroy, but rather to build, namely a different temple, the new community of believers. To this end the evangelist makes use of a traditional motif, that of false witnesses arising against the righteous one in the Psalms.<sup>15</sup> Thus it is not surprising that Jesus also faces such witnesses. But this does not necessarily mean (and Mark also does not want to say), that Jesus never made any such statement about the temple at all; rather the statement has either been (partially) misconstrued or misunderstood (particularly as concerns the first part about the destruction of the temple). Seen the other way around, such tension within the logion or within its larger context can be used to reconstruct its history or sources.

This is all methodologically interesting because in this way two things can be achieved at once: the logion can be critically evaluated in terms of sources and tradition without having to insinuate that the author’s construal is contradictory and that he overlooked the tension between the tradition and his own purposes. Rather, the author has consciously been engaging in a sort of play with the tradition that challenges the reader. In this way the problems mentioned above are solved: For Mark, the temple made with hands was definitely not destroyed by Jesus, and the specification “within three days” is interpreted not only by Mark, but also by John as (resurrected) “after three days” and thus can be simply related to the post-Easter community.

*Conclusion:* While Mark discounts Jesus’ temple logion as a false testimony and at the same time reinterprets aspects of it (and thus retains a positive statement), for the historical Jesus a much more critical bent toward the temple emerges as compared to the so-called cleansing of the temple. Nevertheless, this more critical attitude can be made to fit the overall pattern: In the Kingdom of God there will be a new, improved temple.

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<sup>12</sup> In John Jesus is not at all the acting subject who destroys the temple; his ζῆλος is of a different kind (2:17, 19), and thus there can be no false testimony against him in this regard.

<sup>13</sup> The meaning of the text in Mt 26:60 is not quite clear: If the evangelist was concerned only with the authority of Jesus and not with denying Jesus’ intent to destroy the temple, the testimony of the two witnesses in v. 60b might be understood as true. The ψευδομάρτυρες then appear only in the later variants.

<sup>14</sup> This contrasts with John, where the saying is from the very beginning equivocal.

<sup>15</sup> The NA<sup>28</sup> is the first Nestle-Aland edition to list Ps 27:12; 35:11 in the margin for Mk 14:56.

#### 4. Stephen's Criticism of the Temple

We face exactly the same methodological challenges with the evaluation of Stephen's criticism of the temple in Acts 6:14 and similar is the case for Acts 7:48-50 in Stephen's speech.

In Acts, Stephen ranks as the leading representative of the so-called Hellenists. Although this term occurs only a few times in Acts, the group known as the Hellenists is of essential importance for the history of emerging Christianity and its reconstruction. Scholars typically view the Hellenists as being responsible for early Christian criticism of the law and/or the sacrificial cult. Under this rubric they are seen as the predecessors of the Apostle Paul, or Paul is seen as their most prominent representative. I consider this group, as well as the label "Hellenists", both unavoidable and appropriate if we want to understand the history of the earliest believing community and its incipient controversies with other Jews. First, the emergence and development of Pauline theology and the conflicts concerning the Torah of Moses that came with it would be incomprehensible without the Hellenists. And second, the label "Hellenists" correctly contextualizes these developments: For one thing, it calls to mind the Greek language and culture in which the entire development of early Christianity took place, and in which rational (Hellenistic-philosophical) critique of the cult had already long been going on. And for another thing, the label contextualizes our present inquiry in the midst of developments and conflicts within the variegated (Hellenistic) Judaism of the time period.<sup>16</sup> I also consider the categories of "liberal" and "conservative" Hellenists still to be helpful. In fact, these two schools of thought come immediately to the fore with the topic of temple critique.

If we compare Stephen's (alleged) statement about Jesus against the temple with the logion attributed to Jesus in their various contexts, we notice immediately that the accusations have become stronger: While according to Mark 14:58 the old temple should nevertheless be replaced with a new, improved temple, the idea of an eschatological renewal is completely lacking in Acts 6:14.<sup>17</sup> This is due to the fact, on the one hand, that Jesus is stylized as the eschatological antagonist on the basis of his supposed future alteration of the customs of Moses' Law (cf. Dan 7:25; 1 Macc 1:41-49), and on the other, that Stephen, who supposedly proclaims these coming changes (cf. Acts 6:11: "blasphemous words against Moses and God"), becomes Jesus' mouthpiece and accomplice. In this way, the positive aspect disappears entirely.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> In this respect, I consider Craig C. Hill's (*Hellenists and Hebrews: Reappraising Division within the Earliest Church* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992]) fundamental criticism of the distinction between "Hellenists" and "Hebrews" – with all the necessary differentiation – exaggerated. Cf., by contrast, Michael Zugmann, "Hellenisten" in *der Apostelgeschichte: Historische und exegetische Untersuchungen zu Apg 6,1; 9,29; 11,20*, WUNT II/264 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> The same is the case in Gos. Thom. 71: "Jesus says, 'I will destroy this house, and no one will be able to build it (again).'" For the reasons set forth, I cannot take this version to be an authentic Jesus logion but only a consistent sharpening of the "Hellenistic" criticism of the temple in the mouth of Jesus. This tradition-critical statement is without prejudice to the fact that the logion in the present context probably has a transferred/symbolic ("gnostic") meaning. – Similarly Gos. Pet. 7 (26) concerning the disciples: "... for we were sought after by them as evildoers and as persons who wanted to set fire to the Temple" (trans. Christian Maurer, *NTApoc 1:224*).

<sup>18</sup> On this interpretation, see Eckhard Rau, *Von Jesus zu Paulus: Entwicklung und Rezeption der antiochenischen Theologie im Urchristentum* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1994), 17-18 (following K. Berger). – In Mark, it is not the saying against the temple, but Jesus' confession about his identity in 14:62 that leads to the high priest's charge of blasphemy (v. 64).

The supposed words of Stephen would imply a fundamental criticism of the temple (“destruction”) and the Law of Moses (“change”) in the sense of their complete abrogation (v. 13: “words against this holy place and the law”). This would bear not only on sacrificial legislation, but in Acts primarily on circumcision as the prerequisite to belonging to the people of God, and thus also to the eschatological community (cf. Acts 10-11 and 15).

Stephen’s speech that follows (Acts 7) appears to confirm this. With the words of Isa 66:1-2 (vv. 48-50), Stephen suggests that the temple of Solomon (and thus indirectly the Herodian temple), as a product “made with hands”, in principle contradicts the requirements of God and of his universally active Holy Spirit. The temple is thus set on the same level as Gentile idols, temples and sacrifices (7:40-41, 43; 17:24-25),<sup>19</sup> and it would be a mistake to believe that the temple is the “place” of God’s “rest” (7:49). (The temple is at best a dwelling place for the house of Jacob [7:46], that is, a dwelling for human beings for the purpose of worship, but not for God.)

As for circumcision, Luke considers it a burden that is by no means to be still imposed upon Gentile believers (cf. 15:28), and for the Pauline school it counts even to those things “done with hands” (Eph 2:11) that contradict God’s spirit, or it can be reinterpreted spiritually (Rom 2:28-29).

So, while in the Old Testament it is understood as a positive concession on the part of God that he allows his name to dwell in the Temple (cf. 1 Kings 8:29), in Stephen’s speech (or in the theology of the Hellenists reflected in the speech), the building appears as a negative concession, as a stopgap, that was always wrong, but was both permitted and necessary for the sake of worship (cf. Acts 7:7: “they will worship me in this place”).<sup>20</sup> This compares to the tabernacle (“the tent of witness”) in the wilderness, which was necessary until the building of the temple, and whose construction (“to make”) was completed even according to the heavenly pattern and was prescribed by God himself (7:44-45).<sup>21</sup>

If we ask how the concession of the temple made with hands and its sacrifices have come to their end (the temple could actually be destroyed now; cf. 6:14), two possible answers suggest themselves that can complement one another: one pneumatological and one christological. The first is evident more in Acts and the second primarily in Paul. But both can be viewed in connection with the Hellenists and their fundamental critique of the temple.

In Acts, the activity of the leading Hellenists Stephen and Philip was from the very beginning closely connected with the work of the Holy Spirit. Through the giving of the spirit a new, direct approach to God is made available not only for the Jews (e.g., 7:55-56: Stephen’s vision), but also for the Gentiles (e.g., 10:44-47: where the Gentiles in Cornelius’ household speak in tongues), and this new access makes the temple superfluous (one could also recollect here the prophets and those speaking in tongues in Corinth). On these grounds (and besides,

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<sup>19</sup> It may be that Acts 7:47 means to allude to 3 Kgdms 11:5 LXX (= 1 Kings 11:7 MT; “Then Solomon built a high place ...”). – W. Gil Shin rightly states: “In the LXX (Lev 26.1, 30; Jdt 8.18; Wis 14.8; Isa 2.18; 10.11; 16.12; 19.1; 21.9; 31.7; 46.6; Dan 5.4, 23; 6.28) and elsewhere in Acts (17.24) the word χειροποίητος is consistently associated with idols” (“Integrated Stories and Israel’s Contested Worship Space: Exod 15.17 and Stephen’s Retelling of *Heilsgeschichte* [Acts 7],” *NTS* 64 [2018]: 495-513, here 510).

<sup>20</sup> In Luke 1:73-75 the worship of God does not relate specifically to “this (holy) place” (rather, “covenant” is the keyword that connects Lk 1:72 and Acts 7:8). Thus, one could ask whether “this place” in Acts 7:7 points more generally to the land of Israel where the people should worship God “in holiness and righteousness”.

<sup>21</sup> The idea that the Jerusalem temple cult is a temporary concession can also be found in Ps.-Clem. Rec I 36-37 (here, however, to human habit and ignorance; German text in: Matthias Klinghardt, *Gesetz und Volk Gottes*, WUNT II/32 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988], 294; English text in: *ANF* 8:87).

the temple was actually always unsuitable; see above on 7:48-50), the relationship of humanity to God should not and may no longer be regulated by the temple and its cult. Rather, it is necessary to think and act in accordance with the Holy Spirit, in contrast to the way the leading Jews in the Sanhedrin and their fathers behaved and are still behaving according to Stephen (7:51-53).

In Paul, however, we find a Christological solution to the problem of the temple, as seen in Romans 3:25.<sup>22</sup> There Paul speaks of the “sins previously committed”, which – despite the sacrificial cult – are only done away with through Christ’s function as ἱλαστήριον (“place of atonement”). In this way, the sacrificial cult has become obsolete also for Paul as one of the leading “Hellenists” (to whom he probably owes this thought). In fact, the sacrificial cult was always obsolete for him, since it was unable to effectively redress the sins previously committed.<sup>23</sup> Atonement language is not found in Acts (or in Luke-Acts generally). Instead, to find the topic of the removal of sin, we would have to look at Jesus as a “righteous” martyr and the intercessory prayer of the righteous martyr for sinners (Acts 7:52, 60, and perhaps 7:55-56 [the son of man’s intercessory standing at the right hand of God]; in 1 John 2:1-2 we have a connection between atonement language and the intercession of the righteous one). As far as the end of the sacrificial cult is concerned, we may look at Acts 7:42-43, which we might paraphrase as follows: Back then, in the wilderness, when you were supposed to bring sacrifices, you did not do so. Instead, you followed after Gentile idols.<sup>24</sup> But now that the cult is obsolete (through Jesus the righteous one), you are stubbornly and unteachably (v. 51) clinging to it and thereby bringing divine punishment upon yourselves, just like the fathers in the wilderness.

### *5. The Temple-Logion of Stephen as False Testimony*

Mark 14:58 and Acts 6:14 can be compared with one another in still another respect. In both cases the temple-logion is given as (part of) a false testimony before the Sanhedrin. Thus, as with Mark 14:58, also in Acts 6:11-14 as a whole we face the question of what is false about the testimony. We begin with what is subliminally correct in it: Just as with the readers of Mk 14:58, the addressees of Acts can and should recognize something correct in the accusations against Stephen, that is, we again have a sort of “double message”.

Correct in the testimony is

- 1) that Stephen really does speak in a certain sense against the temple (that is, it cannot regulate the relationship between humanity and God) and against Moses and his law (i.e., sacrifice and circumcision);
- 2) that the challenge to the temple and to the Mosaic law has something to do with Jesus; and
- 3) that these challenges reflect an altered view of important aspects of “common Judaism” (i.e., Torah and temple).

Nevertheless, for Luke and for his intended readers all of this is part of a major false testimony.

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<sup>22</sup> See Günter Röhser, *Stellvertretung im Neuen Testament*, SBS 195 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 2002), 117-19.

<sup>23</sup> It is for this reason that Paul can speak of a period of “divine forbearance” (Rom 3:26a).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Hartwig Thyen, “ἁβυσσία”, in *Exegetisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer 2011), 2:402.



Incorrect in the testimony is

1. that Stephen speaks blasphemously (6:11);
2. that he even speaks “against God” (6:11) – indeed it is a question of God’s very will, which Jesus carries out;
3. as in Mark, that Jesus’ violent destruction of the temple (6:14) is at issue (see καταλύω in both texts);
4. that the so-called destruction of the temple and the changing of the customs will only occur in the future (see the future tense forms in 6:14); and
5. that Jesus is the eschatological antagonist.

By portraying the testimony against Stephen as slanderous, Luke repudiates the accusations against him. Luke makes them useless for the complaint against Stephen (and against the position of the “Hellenists”). Yet at the same time Luke retains elements of “Hellenistic” theology. Put the other way around, Luke subliminally imparts “Hellenistic” Theology by taking up the logion from Mark 14:58 (which he had omitted in his gospel), making significant changes to it,<sup>25</sup> and then correcting it by calling it a false testimony and thus making it compatible with a more harmless understanding of the “Hellenistic” cause: Jesus did not literally destroy the temple, and he will not do so in the future, but he did curtail the significance of the temple. Jesus also did not rescind the law as the revelation of God’s will (cf. Acts 7:53), but there could be changes to the customs.

Whether the “Hellenists” would have formulated things this way themselves can remain an open question. But in any case, one has to keep in mind that criticisms of the temple and circumcision are neither historically nor objectively on the same level. Circumcision is one of the so-called identity markers of Judaism and becomes an issue for emerging Christianity only when it goes beyond the ethnic boundaries of Judaism (Gentile mission). This would not have been acceptable to the Jerusalem Hellenists. According to Acts, the Hellenists only become proponents and protagonists of the Gentile mission after their expulsion from Jerusalem (Acts 8; 11).

On the contrary, criticism of the temple – as seen above – is connected with the original soteriological experiences of the believers in Christ and from the very beginning is an integral part of “Hellenistic” theology. Therefore, the changes to the customs, as far as the historical Stephen is concerned, may relate only to the cult, especially the sacrificial customs (and thus to the temple), and not even to circumcision as a prerequisite for acceptance into the people of God. However, the conviction of the universal efficacy of God and His Spirit throughout the world, which formed the initial basis for temple criticism in Acts 7, was an important spiritual prerequisite for the later universal mission of the Hellenists and probably led to a degree of openness to non-Jews already in Jerusalem.

How these two things (temple criticism and circumcision criticism) come together can be seen very well in Paul, especially in the above mentioned passage in Romans 3. The statement critical of sacrifice in v. 25-26, because of its tradition-historical references (atonement, divine forbearance), primarily focuses on the Jewish past and can only be related to the Gentiles when it is connected with the doctrine of justification (especially in vv. 26-28). And with that, the subject of circumcision / uncircumcision (v. 30) will also be the focus of

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<sup>25</sup> The distance between the original logion and the one in Acts thus increases, of course (the Torah is now in play, and the entire saying is formulated in the third person). Conversely, the changes probably rightly reflect that the Hellenists saw in Jesus – as he is depicted in the temple-logion – the impetus for their movement. This explains the similarities and differences between the two forms of the logion. Cf. Klaus Berger, *Theologiegeschichte des Urchristentums*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Tübingen: Francke, 1995), 162-63 (§ 77).

discussion. It can be said that the historical development is well reflected in this sequence of the Pauline text.

#### 6. *The Integration of the “Hellenistic” Position into Luke-Acts as a Whole*

Luke treats Stephen’s speech in Acts 7 much the same way as he treats the temple-logion: he retains elements of “Hellenistic” theology (i.e., criticism of the temple and its cult) and integrates them into an entire salvation-historical conception.

-While in 7:48-50 the temple appears to be rejected in a radically “Hellenistic” way, it plays a prominent role throughout the rest of Luke-Acts as a symbol of continuity between the pre- and post-Easter disciples.

-Other criticisms of the law are not found in the speech. Stephen does not question circumcision for Jews or Jewish Christians (cf. 7:8). While uncircumcision (for Gentile Christians) is still implied in the changing of the customs in Acts 6:14, non-Jewish believers are later enjoined to keep other parts of the law instead of circumcision (the apostolic decree in 15:28-29). Indeed, at the end of the speech Stephen presupposes the requirement of keeping the law (7:53).

Again here we are faced with the same methodological challenge as with the temple-logia. Luke is, after all, not interested in offering us any clues for our source- and tradition-critical inquiries with his multifaceted text (although *de facto* he does offer us several!). Rather, he seeks to integrate the theological position of a leading “Hellenist” (Stephen) into his own theological program. As a result, we cannot be satisfied with unearthing the (supposedly historical) standpoint of the Hellenists, whose concerns and message Luke indeed makes recognizable. Instead, we must at the same time also consider the entire context of Luke-Acts. And in fact for Luke the theological significance of the Jerusalem temple is not at its end, but to the contrary it makes up an essential element of Luke’s salvation-history. Luke retains the temple from Acts 2:46 onward as a meeting place for the early community, as a place of prayer and teaching (particularly the interpretation of Scripture), and of all cultic practices, including for the offering required to complete a Nazirite vow (21:26; cf. Num 6:14-17). We have already mentioned Isa 56:7 when we examined Mk 11:15-17 and its parallel in Luke 19:46. It cannot be ruled out that the “conservative” Hellenists would have allowed not only prayer in the temple but also offerings – presumably only by Jewish Christians, however (the “liberals” would have certainly rejected both in the temple). Incidentally, this also shows that there must have been transitions and similarities between the “Hellenists” and “Hebrews” (also on this question) and that it would be wrong to accept strict “ideological” boundaries between the groups in the early church.

The Jerusalem temple remains for Luke the legitimate location for worship of God in accordance with the promise to Abraham (7:7; cf. Lk 24:53). If only the “idolatrous” understanding of the temple, so to speak, is precluded, whereby the temple represents the special and exclusive dwelling place of God, the special and exclusive place of contact between humanity and God, and the place that regulates the relationship to God, can the believer continue to make use of the temple. This conservative view makes up precisely the point of difference with the “liberal” Hellenists. In this way, Luke and all believers can finally, without contradicting Stephen’s criticism of the temple, say together with Paul, “I have neither sinned against the law of the Jews nor against the temple ...” (25:8; cf. 7:53 and 21:24, which have to do with guarding the law).

A good example of where Luke seamlessly integrates a “Hellenistic” position into his context without evoking a double message is Acts 21:27-28. The passage tells of Paul being falsely

accused by some Jews from Asia (cf. 24:19) of teaching “everyone everywhere against the people, the law and this place”. At its core this is the same accusation brought against Stephen, only here it is even more comprehensive (cf. 6:13). Here the complaint is added that Paul brought Greeks into the temple and thus defiled this holy place (in 24:6 this is described as an attempt to profane the temple). Luke is quick to add that this was a misunderstanding (21:29): They had seen the Ephesian Trophimus together with Paul and assumed that Paul had taken him into the temple (21:26). Compared to the two temple-logia, this case is clearly “only” a misunderstanding; a malicious false testimony is ruled out.<sup>26</sup> Luke makes clear that Paul did not bring any non-Jew into the Temple. At the same time Luke intimates by means of Paul’s non-Jewish companion that God is absolutely announcing through Paul a new way of salvation also for non-Jewish peoples (cf. 22:15, 21 in Paul’s subsequent apologia). But, differently than in Mark 11:17 (the eschatological temple as “the house of prayer for all peoples” with full access for non-Jews), for Luke, non-Jews have unrestricted access to salvation, but not to the Jerusalem temple. The temple is and remains the house of prayer (and of offerings) for Jews and Jewish believers, and it is for this reason that Luke omits Mark and Isaiah’s “for all peoples” in Lk 19:46.

One can also not say that “Jesus and his apostles take over the role of the old Temple so that they become newly built corporeal temples.”<sup>27</sup> One may perhaps say that Jesus and his followers enact and produce sanctity around them. “Thus, sacredness does not dwell in a fixed place, such as the Temple, but is fluidly expanded across previously restricted place.”<sup>28</sup> But this is accomplished only by the Holy Spirit, and he indeed breaks the dimensions of the temple and is active in the worldwide church, but he does so as a transcending of the temple and not a substitution. And in this way, it remains unclear whether the restoration of the temple belongs to the eschatological salvation that Luke expects.

This can also be said critically of Nicholas H. Taylor, who correctly describes the role of the Holy Spirit (“In Acts, divine presence has come to be manifested in and through the Holy Spirit in the life of the Church”<sup>29</sup> and “is portrayed as dispersed with the spread of the Church”<sup>30</sup>), but speaks of the “ending of the localisation of the divine presence in the sanctuary with the coming of John the Baptist”,<sup>31</sup> such that the temple “would therefore not be restored”.<sup>32</sup> For Luke, the presence of God was never limited to the temple, but in that sense, it also never ended there (at least not as long as the temple existed), when Jews (i.e., Jewish Christians) made the right use of it. And nothing can be said about its future eschatological destiny.

Similarly, W. G. Shin has recently shown once again “that what [the Lukan] Stephen is critical of is a view that confines God to a temple and not the idea that God may encountered in a temple itself ...”.<sup>33</sup> And he rightly notes that the “adversative force” in Acts 7:48 “is not simply directed at a ‘house’ that Solomon builds (v. 47), but rather at the danger that the

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<sup>26</sup> Another glaring misunderstanding occurs in Acts 21:21 with the rumor that Paul teaches Jews living among the Gentiles to forsake circumcision and the customs generally (cf. 16:3; 28:17).

<sup>27</sup> *Contra* Deok Hee Jung, “Fluid Sacredness from a Newly Built Temple in Luke–Acts,” *ExpTim* 128 (2017): 529–537, here 529.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Nicholas H. Taylor, “Luke–Acts and the Temple”, in *The Unity of Luke–Acts*, ed. Joseph Verheyden, BETL 142 (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 709–721, here 720.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 714.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 720.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 716. See further Nicholas H. Taylor, “Stephen, the Temple and Early Christian Eschatology,” *RB* 110 (2003): 62–85.

<sup>33</sup> Shin, “Integrated Stories,” 510.

nature of this ‘house’ may be erroneously construed as a way of rejoicing in the works of hands. This is confirmed by the subsequent quotation from Isa 66.1. The key concern of this quoted passage is not the construction of a house-form sanctuary per se but how the nature of such a form is understood. Considering that the entire world is God’s ‘house’, so to speak (heaven being his throne and earth his footstool, v. 49), what matters is, ‘*What kind of house* (ποῖον οἶκον;) will you build for me?’ (v. 49), since God’s hand has made all things (v. 50).”<sup>34</sup> Not the house and the temple cult are crucial, but the way they are understood and used. There is no longer any fundamental rejection of the temple like the Hellenist position.

### *7. Final Conclusion*

In contrast to the various versions of the temple incident, we can hear in the (supposed or actual) temple-logia a clearly more critical emphasis toward the existing temple (“destruction”). This is likewise the case with the so-called Hellenists, whose (liberal) positions toward the temple and the law Luke reveals (abrogation of the cult, rejection of the sanctuary made with hands, changes to the customs of Moses’ Law), but only subliminally and by means of a “double message”. However, Luke and Mark are concerned to pull back, soften or reinterpret any position toward the temple (and the law) that is too destructive or too liberal by establishing a particular context (e.g., false testimony, misunderstanding) and an interpretive framework for the pieces of tradition. But in so doing they do not allow the true aspects of the tradition to go completely forgotten.

This is a remarkable result in two regards: first, for the question of the “parting of the ways” between Christianity and Judaism as it relates to the temple (i.e., there is no linear process of estrangement, but rather a back and forth or a juxtaposition of rejection and reinterpretation), and second as an example of early Christian tolerance of tension within the movement itself (deviating positions are not simply suppressed, but integrated as far as possible). At the same time, the example shows how a consideration of literary stratification leads to a better understanding of the present text. Despite the primacy of synchronic methods, the question of past traditions and sources remains important and indispensable for a historical understanding of our texts.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 510-11; emphasis original.