

RBL 02/2004

Kerr, Alan R.

The Temple of Jesus' Body: The Temple Theme in the Gospel of John

Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 220

Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002.

Pp. 432. Hardcover. \$115.00. ISBN 1841272620.

James P. Sweeney
Immanuel Church
Chelmsford, MA 01824

In this study Alan Kerr of Dunedin, New Zealand, investigates the temple theme in the Gospel of John. His thesis, briefly stated, is that the Johannine Jesus replaces and fulfills the Jerusalem temple and its cultic activity, including its associated festivals, priestly rituals, and sacrifices (ix, 2, 31 *et passim*).

In chapter 1 Kerr provides a general introduction of the contours of his study. He justifies the need for the study by noting that until the more recent dissertation of Mary Coloe ("The Dwelling of God among Us: The Symbolic Function of the Temple in the Fourth Gospel" [Th.D. thesis, Melbourne College of Divinity, Australia, 1998]), the temple theme in the Gospel of John had not been treated systematically and extensively. He further sets forth his working assumptions on isagogic issues. He suggests that the author was likely a man with priestly connections, that he wrote post-70 C.E. (ca. 85), and that his audience may have been broadly conceived: Jews and Gentiles, both Christian and non-Christian. Writing in the cultic vacuum of post-70 C.E. for all who had participated in the worship at the temple and its associated festivals, the Evangelist addresses the question, "What now?" with the answer of Jesus as replacement and fulfillment.

Chapter 2 is devoted to Jewish responses to the fall of the temple in 70 C.E. Drawing on the works of S. Motyer ("John 8.31–59 and the Rhetoric of Persuasion in the Fourth Gospel" [Ph.D. diss., King's College, University of London, 1993]), J. Neusner ("Emergent Rabbinic Judaism in a Time of Crisis: Four Responses to the Destruction of the Second Temple," *Judaism* 71 [1972]: 313–27), and others, Kerr isolates four Jewish responses to this crisis: Torah-directed, *merkabah* or apocalyptic mysticism, an activist eschatology, and a quietist eschatology. Kerr maintains that the Johannine response does not reflect Torah, *merkabah*, or activist emphases. Rather, it operates within an ethos of

quietist eschatology, presenting Jesus as the fulfillment and replacement of the temple and its accompanying rituals.

The heart of Kerr's study is chapter 3, "The New Temple: John 2.13–22," for it is here that one finds an explicit link between Jesus and the temple. Kerr contends that this episode should be interpreted as a two-sided sign heralding that the eschatological day of the Lord has come in the person of Jesus (cf. Zech 14:21), with attendant judgment and salvation. The reflection of the Evangelist in 2:19 implies the destruction of the inner life of temple on one level ("a house of trade" rather than "my Father's house") and, at a deeper level, that Jesus' body will be consumed. This act will issue in the hope of resurrection, not of a temple of wood and stone, but as John 2:21 indicates, the temple of Jesus' body.

Kerr turns to an examination of the Prologue in chapter 4, which he describes as the Evangelist's attempt to set forth the new beginning in Jesus. Kerr characterizes this transformation as a hermeneutic for a radical revision of Judaism. He begins by recognizing a tight thematic connection between the Prologue and the remainder of the Gospel. After analyzing various structural (particularly chiasmic) elements, he proposes three findings. John 1:17 offers a new hermeneutic for the Torah—namely, Jesus as its fulfillment. John 1:14, which contains strong exodus allusions, indicates that Jesus is the new locus of divine presence (temple) in the incarnation. John 1:12, the heart of the chiasmic spiral of the Prologue, sets forth a new way of becoming members of God's family through receiving the incarnate Word.

The focus of chapter 5 is on John 1:51. Various scholars have proposed differing types of links between the programmatic vision of angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man and the temple. Kerr examines these proposals in some detail and concludes that there is no necessary link with the temple in this passage, though he recognizes in it a strong christological focus on the revelation of God through the Son of Man. In this sense the verse is, as W. D. Davies once noted, "kaleidoscopic."

Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman in John 4:16–24 is the main topic of chapter 6. In it Kerr examines the eschatological era that Jesus has ushered in through his death and resurrection, one that he proleptically characterizes as worship of the Father in Spirit and truth (4:24). Kerr maintains that the Johannine Jesus reveals that this worship is not tied to a physical cultic site but is focused on himself as the gift of God (4:10), the prophet (4:17–19), and the presence of the self-revelatory God of Israel (4:26). The living water that Jesus offers represents both the Spirit, who glorifies Jesus (16:14) and testifies on behalf of him (15:26), and the new Torah—the revelatory Word (1:1, 17) of the one who has become incarnate (1:14).

The temple festivals are treated in chapter 7. Kerr examines the relationship of the Johannine Jesus to the temple festivals of the Passover, Tabernacles, and Dedication. He also looks at the Sabbath. Kerr contends that the Evangelist presents Jesus as the focus and fulfillment of three of these festivals. Through his death on the cross Jesus becomes the Passover Lamb. As the giver of the Spirit (John 7:37-39), Jesus is the true tabernacle (1:14). John 10:36, moreover, echoes the consecration of the temple courts celebrated in the Feast of Dedication. Kerr believes that the Johannine Jesus' relation to the Sabbath is more complex. Jesus has transformed the Jewish Sabbath in the sense that it has been overtaken by the day of the Father's work through the Son and the Son's work through his disciples. Jesus has further ushered in the eschatological Sabbath supremely and definitively in his death and resurrection.

In chapter 8 Kerr traces some possible temple connections in John 13–14. Maintaining that John 13–17 partakes of a genre of the farewell speech and that John 13–14 represents the first farewell discourse, Kerr suggests that the reference to “my Father's house” in 14:2 is an allusion to the temple on analogy to John 2:16. He contends that the temple theme is further developed in two ways. The washing of John 13 represents preparation for entry into the new temple centered in Jesus himself and participation in all that it represents, namely, Jesus' passion, death, and resurrection. John 14:2–3, moreover, points to Jesus' establishment of the new eschatological temple into which his disciples are incorporated as members of a new family (1:12). Jesus' continuing presence with his disciples is made possible through the Paraclete, the functional parallel to Jesus (14:16, 23).

In chapter 9 Kerr examines John 17 for possible high priestly and temple allusions. Kerr finds an allusion to Jesus' high-priestly status in 18:13–24, suggesting that the confusion regarding who is the real high priest (Caiaphas or Annas) provides a subtle critique of the priesthood and signifies that Jesus is the true high priest. The majority of the chapter, however, is devoted to John 17. Kerr's findings are wide-ranging. He suggests regarding 17:11c that the name the Father gave to Jesus was *egō eimi*, a name closely associated with YHWH. The “I am's” of the Gospel further reveal Jesus to be one who fulfills the temple and its festivals, including, *inter alia*, Passover (John 6), Tabernacles (John 7), the door and altar of sacrifice (John 10). Jesus' petition for the preservation of his disciples (17:11–12) points to the sphere of safety often associated in the Scriptures with the temple. His prayer for the disciples' unity (17:11, 21–23a), in the light of the imagery of Ps 133, again evokes temple and high-priestly imagery. Jesus' petition that his glory and honor be given to the disciples (17:22) connotes the priestly imagery associated with

Num 6:23–27. Finally, Jesus’ sanctification of himself for the sake of his disciples (17:17–19) bears sacrificial connotations, presenting Jesus as sacrificial victim.

In the remaining chapter Kerr sets forth in summary fashion his main points argued throughout the course of his study. He further concedes that his study has not exhausted the temple theme, expressing confidence that there are still further passages that should be investigated that may cast further light on this topic.

While the substance of Kerr’s thesis that Jesus replaces and fulfills the Jerusalem temple and its cultic activity is conspicuous in some of the major commentaries on John, his study provides a more focused and sustained argument of this central thesis than is possible in a commentary. Both his thesis and conclusions on this matter, however, may be compared to the recent essay of Judith Lieu, “Temple and Synagogue in John,” *NTS* 45 (1999): 51–69, who sees the temple in the Gospel of John as the supreme center of the Jews, a place both of teaching and of the manifestation of the divine presence. Such widely divergent findings on the same subject of study highlight how differing suppositions and contrasting approaches can widely affect the results.

At points Kerr’s arguments for temple connections do not appear to be persuasive, such as his suggestion that John 10:36 echoes the consecration of the temple courts celebrated in the Feast of Dedication or that the footwashing of John 13:1–20 signifies preparation and participation in Jesus as the new temple. Similarly, it is doubtful that John 18:13–24 seeks to answer the alleged question, “Who is the *real* high priest?” with Jesus. Despite Kerr’s tendency to push his thesis too far, however, there are nonetheless many points where his study is suggestive, particularly his detailed tracing of Johannine themes in the light of scriptural allusions and his arguments for their interconnectedness with the temple and its cultic activity. The focus of the study, it should be observed, is on the *Sitz im Leben* of the Evangelist and his readers in cultic vacuum of post-70 Judaism. As a result, no clear attention is given to the admittedly controversial but nonetheless important question of whether the suggested theme of Jesus as the replacement and fulfillment of the Jerusalem temple and its cultic activity represents the intention of Jesus. Given Kerr’s attention to prominent Johannine themes against the backdrop of scriptural allusions and the detailed, sustained nature of his arguments for temple connections, his study deserves a careful reading by those working in Johannine studies.