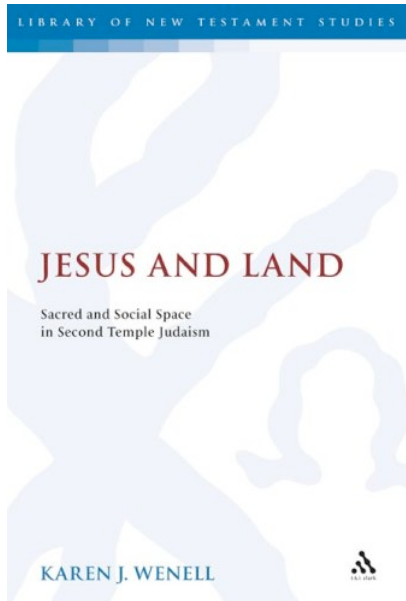


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Wenell, Karen J.

Jesus and Land: Sacred and Social Space in Second Temple Judaism

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In this book Karen Wenell probes the notion of land and sacred space in the worldview of Jesus, an important topic that certainly deserve attention. The book is part of the series the Library of New Testament Studies (LNTS). As the title promises, Wenell places the subject of Jesus and land within the broader context of Second Temple Judaism. She approaches the topic by exploring three main areas: Jesus' relationship to the temple; his views on purity; and the significance of "the twelve." Wenell's analysis centers on Jesus' vision of the kingdom in spatial terms, and for this she makes use of the works of spatial theorists such as Henri Lefebvre and Jonathan Z. Smith.

In the first chapter ("Land as Problem and Promise") Wenell defines sacred space by providing a memorable analysis of IKEA as a contrasting example of nonsacred space, and she differentiates between several kinds of space, such as symbolic space, real space (built environment), and social space. These spatial concepts are important when evaluating the relationship between God, people, and land in Jesus' worldview. She asks why Jesus would have paid little attention to the land, as scholars sometimes claim, since the covenantal promise of land as well as the holiness of Jerusalem and the land was emphasized in Judaism in his time. It is a reasonable conclusion that Jesus, like his

contemporaries, would be highly concerned about these spaces. Hence, she establishes the importance of her inquiry.

The second chapter (“The Temple as Contested Space”) includes an overview of the role and significance of the main sacred structures in Israel’s history from the period of the tabernacle to the temple in Jesus’ time. The chapter deals with the conflict over the temple by various groups that produced alternative “representations of space.” Unfortunately, a two-page survey on some Qumran texts related to the temple, mainly the Community Rule and Temple Scrolls, hardly gives the material the attention it deserves. The main question in this chapter concerns what role the temple plays in Jesus’ vision of the kingdom. Wenell agrees with E. P. Sanders and others that Jesus’ violent action in the temple entails a strong eschatological message about the coming destruction of the temple. She differs from Sanders, however, by also detecting both a sharp critique against the priesthood and a message of judgment in Jesus’ prophetic actions. Furthermore, in contrast to Sanders, she claims that Jesus did not expect a future, restored temple. Instead, the kingdom in his vision was not centered on a temple. A key argument is that the Testament of Moses, according to Wenell, does not envision a future temple after the destruction of the temple at the end times. Given the many apocalyptic Jewish texts that take a future temple for granted, this is not a persuasive argument on its own. Nevertheless, in the fine analysis of the Gospel texts that follows, paying special attention to the sayings relating to the building of a temple “not made with hands” (Mark 14:58), Wenell builds a strong case that Jesus may not have expected a temple in a physical, concrete sense. Instead, Jesus draws on imagery of the camp in the wilderness and may be predicting God’s real presence in more imprecise terms; she concludes: “If Jesus did say something like that phrase attributed to him by his accusers in the gospels regarding a new temple not made with hands, perhaps all we can know about such a temple is that it compares with *Jubilees* simple statement: ‘I will build my sanctuary in their midst’ (1.17)” (56). This is an example where her exegesis, informed by spatial theories, brings much-needed nuance and sophistication to an old debate.

Chapter 3 (“Embodied Sacred Space: Purity in the Land”) deals with Jesus’ views on the topic of purity. The chapter includes an introduction to the purity system in Leviticus and descriptions of purity views held by various groups (Sadducees, Pharisees, Qumran movement, and Samaritans). She also describes purity practices in the late Second Temple period that includes an in-depth description of the use and characteristics of *miqvaot*. For example, highlighting the spread of *miqvaot* in the land, including the region of Galilee, she draws the important conclusion that purity practices had much broader uses than temple piety. There is a mistake in the presentation of the purity laws in Leviticus, however, that is worth mentioning; in her list of people who are instructed to wash after becoming impure Wenell includes (69–70) “a man who touches something that a woman

with the regular or irregular discharge touched (Lev. 15:19–30).” But the biblical law concerns objects upon which an impure woman has sat or lay, not things she has touched. The law thus implies quite a different scenario than what Wenell presents to her readers, namely, that a menstruating woman and a *zavah* can still function within the home without transmitting impurity to any objects she touches. The main contribution in this chapter to the general scholarship on purity lies in her discussions of the social aspects of the Jewish purity system. She elaborates on purity laws as boundary markers to non-Jews and also as markers distinguishing between different Jewish groups. Wenell also discusses the economic costs involved in building and maintaining *miqvaot* as well as the production of stone vessels and suggests that the purity system may be related to an ideology of the elite. This aspect is certainly interesting and worth further exploration.

When it comes to her interpretation of Jesus’ stance on purity, however, the novel approach and interesting angles that otherwise mark Wenell’s analyses are not apparent. Instead, her presentation seems surprisingly traditional. Basically, she reiterates that Jesus rejects purity laws because he heals the impure, touches impure corpses, and socializes with the outcast, including the impure (99–100). She also points to Mark 7:15 and to the late source *Papyrus Oxyrhynchus* 840 as support for her position. Wenell suggests that for Jesus impurity is mostly related to the impure spirits rather than bodily impurity. This association of evil spirits with impurity is, however, not unique to Jesus, as Wenell seems to suggest, but appears also in the Dead Sea Scrolls (e.g., the expression “unclean spirit” in 4Q444 I 8; 11QPs^a XIX 15; “spirit of impurity” in 1QS IV 22). She compares Jesus’ stance on purity with that of other groups (Pharisees, Sadducees, Qumran movement) and John the Baptist and concludes that it is “strikingly different.” She states, for example, “Purity distinguishes and separates. Jesus does not keep a small, spatially restricted pure community. He travels throughout the towns of villages of Galilee healing, exorcising and welcoming ‘sinners’” (103). Further, “To connect this chapter to the previous chapter, a rejection of purity as a boundary marker fits with Jesus’ lack of focus on the temple in his mission” (103). It is quite problematic that Wenell places the demand for purity and the love command of Jesus at two opposite poles as if these were in conflict with each other: “Jesus does not engage in halakhic debate over the finer points of non-priestly purity like the Pharisees. Rather, he emphasizes the importance of the love commandment over adherence to purity laws” (101). Her whole discussion seems to rest on the misconception that Jews were obliged to avoid impurity according to the law and that Jesus somehow disregarded the law by incurring impurity through touch. This was evidently not the case. Impurity was simply a part of life: women menstruated, people buried their relatives, and married couples engaged in sex—without necessarily being suspected of rejecting the purity laws. As Sanders has demonstrated, there is no evidence in the Gospels that Jesus transgressed impurity laws, for example, by entering the temple in an impure state. Most

scholars would agree that Jesus had a liberal view on matters of purity compared to other groups, but whether that implies a rejection of purity laws is highly contested. Since Wenell takes a firm stance in this debate, one would have liked to see her engaging in the issue in more depth than she currently does.

Chapter 4 (“Imagined Space: Jesus’ Group of Twelve”) is a fine analysis of the connection between the election of “the twelve” and the land. Wenell establishes the authenticity of the tradition of the twelve and analyzes the rich tradition of the twelve tribes as well as the deep symbolism of the number twelve. She points out that the twelve tribes are connected to twelve territories and that space therefore is a central aspect of the symbolism of the twelve. Jesus’ vision then implies a new distribution of territory, particularly territory to people with no pedigree. Convincingly, Wenell detects similarities between Jesus’ message and those of the sign prophets described by Josephus concerning imagery of a new entry into the land. Furthermore, she notes that Jesus’ saying about a gathering from east and west in Matt 8:11–12/Luke 13:28–29 (Luke adds north and south) implies a gathering to a place, which in this image is the land of Israel. Hence, the borders of the kingdom are not envisioned to be extended to the whole creation, as N. T. Wright maintains. Those who gather include both those who come home to the land, Israel, and outsiders, Gentiles and other outsiders; thus the borders of the kingdom are quite open. The tribal image of the kingdom also points to “a landed space” (138): “though this is an eschatological portrait, we do not need to assume that it is a landless portrait” (126). Although “earthed,” the future kingdom is also heavenly in a sense (in Matthew’s terminology) in that it is also a new realm under God’s control and is a new world order. What is the eschatological role of the twelve? As judges, they will not only rule but also judge in the sense of condemning people. Importantly, their eschatological rule over the twelve tribes also implies the fulfillment of the covenantal promise of land.

In chapter 5 (“Jesus and Land: Millenarian Dreams of Space”) Wenell sums up her understanding of Jesus’ vision of the kingdom as it relates to the land:

His vision was not centered on the temple, nor reinforced by ritual maintenance of the boundaries of purity within the land. It recalled a new tribal arrangement which was open at its borders and promised places for those outside, and for those without status or position. It tapped into deeply held hopes for a new and better world, a new spatial arrangement with God as King. Jesus’ message established a new sacred space, and a new relationship between God, people and kingdom. (139)

This is an important study on a topic that has not been examined thoroughly in New Testament studies. The weaknesses in the book are due to the fact that it covers several

broad topics in just under 150 pages. Consequently, from a scholarly point of view the analyses appear quite brief and introductory at times, as in the case of the temple in the Dead Sea Scrolls mentioned above. The treatment of Jesus' view on purity also suffers from a lack of depth. On the other hand, the brevity and introductory nature of the descriptions may be seen as strengths of the book for a broader readership. The series LNTS is intended for "scholars, teachers in the field of New Testament studies, post graduate students and advanced undergraduates." Both academics and students who are interested in spatial studies on the New Testament will likely enjoy reading this book. Nevertheless, scholars will prosper most from Wenell's discussions of larger themes related to space in Jewish society and in Jesus' teaching, while students will also appreciate the introductory sections. Overall, Wenell presents an insightful and thought-provoking study on spatial dimensions underlying Jesus' message about the kingdom, thereby making an important contribution to the scholarship on the historical Jesus.