



The ‘enigma of Jesus’ temple intervention: Four essential keys

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The emerging consensus, on the intervention of Jesus into the commercial operations of the Jerusalem Temple, speaks in terms of an enacted parable aimed at the temple hierarchy, against the backdrop of the ongoing economic and social oppression of the time. In this article, I consider four essential scholarly insights (keys): The possibility that Caiaphas introduced trade in sacrifices in the Jerusalem Temple; the link between the money changers and Greek-style bankers; the Jewish witness to the extent of high-priestly corruption in the 1st century CE; and finally the presence of the image of Baal-Melkart on the Tyrian Shekel. In the light of the fourth key, in particular, we discover Jesus, like the prophets of old (Jeremiah and Elijah), standing against the greed of the High priests and their abuse of the poor and marginalised, by defending the honour of God, and pronouncing judgement on the temple hierarchy as ‘bandits’ (Jr 7:11) and, like their ancestors, encouragers of ‘Baal worship’ (Jr 7:9).

Introduction

According to the four Canonical Gospels, Jesus entered the Jerusalem Temple, at Passover (c. 30–33 CE), and disrupted the commercial activities of the Temple, including driving out buyers and sellers, perhaps animals as well, and scattering the coins of the money changers. The Fourth Gospel places the intervention at the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry, while the Synoptic Gospels locate it during his final week, before his crucifixion. Both versions (John and the Synoptics) associate the incident with increased tension between Jesus and the Jewish high-priestly aristocracy (Carson 1991:176). I dedicate this article to Pieter De Villiers in appreciation of his fine work as a New Testament scholar and of our friendship across the years.

Traditionally, the incident has been called ‘The Temple Cleansing’, but that is an interpretation rather than a pure description – so, for this article, I will use the term ‘intervention’ which literally, in the original Latin, means the ‘coming into’. Intervention as a neutral term leaves open the degree of physical force involved, and the actual intention of the primary actor (namely Jesus). Specifically, Jesus disrupted the commercial activities of the Temple, so we may speak of Jesus’ intervention in the commerce of the Jerusalem Temple, without suggesting that his interests were primarily spiritual, commercial or political. Since the event is filled with symbolism, we may add the adjective ‘parabolic’ to infer its parable-like function (Cranfield 1977:356).

What scholars are saying

Scholarly discussion of Jesus’ actions in the Temple, from the earliest Christian centuries to the present time, has been markedly rich and varied, starting with the quintessential question of historicity. Sanders (1985:77), representing probably the majority of scholars, considers the event to be a key historical moment in Jesus’ ministry, while Buchanan (1991), one of the minority voices, believes it to be entirely fictional and based on the occupation of the Temple by the Zealots in 66 CE. Black (2009:107) argues that since the incident is found in both John and Mark, it is surely pre-Markan. Recently, Borg and Crossan (2008:52) concluded that ‘the pre-Markan combination of symbolic action as a fulfilment of the prophetic citation from Jeremiah goes back to the historical Jesus himself’, which seems to be a reasonable assumption.

Opinion is even more varied with regard to the interpretation of the event. Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998:73) notice that: ‘Scholars have been unable to decide whether this incident represents an attempt at reforming the temple (often called the “cleansing”), or a prophetic action symbolizing the temple’s destruction.’ Such actions may be linked to preparations for the coming Kingdom of God (Hiers 1971). Herzog (1992), in a very useful analysis of the event, divides modern academic opinion into four categories, each one arguing that the event was primarily religious, messianic, prophetic or political in orientation. By religious, Herzog means an event intended

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to 'cleanse the temple of impurities, whether commercial or sacerdotal'; by messianic, to 'include the Gentiles in the scope of the Temple's activities'; by prophetic, to 'announce the destruction of the Temple and its eschatological restoration'; and by political, to 'disrupt the commercial and sacerdotal activities of the Temple because they had become oppressive and exploitative' (1992:820; see Tan 1997:169–179). One might debate Herzog's categories, but his generalisations are useful in illustrating the diversity of opinion around what appears to be a reasonably simple event. Ultimately, even the Gospel writers are drawn into the debate, with each writer setting the event in a framework of their choice.

What happened?

Like a mystery novel, the key question is 'what happened?' and there is no shortage of answers from the four Gospels. Each Gospel writer encapsulates the temple events in a context of their own devising (McAfee Moss 2008:90, fn. 3) and, through editorial comments and verses from the Hebrew Bible, they offer their own interpretation of the Jesus event. Common to all four Gospels is the result of Jesus' actions, namely the division it brings among the witnesses to the event and the ultimate consequences for Jesus. For the sake of this article, I will focus on the Gospels of Mark and John representing two different traditions, yet a common source.

Mark's account

Mark has Jesus' triumphal entry (Mk 11:1–10), followed by his first visit to the temple, when he looks around 'at everything' and because it is late in the day, returns with his disciples to Bethany (v. 11). The Gospel of Mark thus separates the account of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem from his temple intervention. Mark dates the entry to the first day of the week. On that occasion, Jesus visits the temple but takes no action (Mk 11:11). The next day, on the way to the temple, Jesus curses a fig tree (vv. 12–14), before re-entering the temple. Jesus takes action (v. 15) including casting out those that sold and those who bought in the temple, and overthrowing (κατέστρεψε) the tables (τὰς τραπέζας) of the money changers (τῶν κολλυβιστῶν) and the seats of those who sold doves. Mark, alone, has the detail (v. 16) that Jesus would allow no one to carry a vessel through the temple which may be a reference to the Mishnaic regulation about taking shortcuts through the temple (m. Ber 9.5 and cf. Cranfield 1977:358), and which Herzog translates into an apparent desire on behalf of the Markan Jesus to restore the holiness of the place (1992:818).

Jesus, following Mark 11:17, cites two prophetic oracles: from Isaiah, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer' (see Lk 19:46 and Mt 21:13) with only Mark, including the words 'for all the nations' (Is 56:7) (Lambrecht 2013); and from Jeremiah, 'But you have made it a bandits' (ληιστῶν) cave (σπήλαιον)' (Jr 7:11). The Hebrew term (לְיָרֵב) found in Jeremiah (7:11) and Ezekiel (7:22) occurs some five times in the Hebrew Bible and in each case conveys the idea of violence (Domeris 1997). The LXX (cf. Jr 7:11) uses ληιστῶν, a term also used by Josephus (War 2:13:1–3) in reference to the Jewish revolutionaries of his

day (Horsley 1987:37). In the New Testament, it is found in the crucifixion scene (e.g. Mk 15:27). Horsley (1987:37) suggests that the term should be understood as 'social bandits' rather than simply 'bandits' or the traditional 'robbers'. However, the Jewish context of foreign occupation indicates that the meaning of a revolutionary or rebel should be kept in mind.

In response to the words of Jesus, Mark notes that the chief priests and scribes plot to destroy Jesus, but they also fear him, because the crowds are attentive to his teaching (v. 18). The next day, the disciples notice that the fig tree has withered, and when Peter draws Jesus' attention to this fact (v. 21), Jesus is prompted to speak about faith (vv. 22–24) and forgiveness (vv. 25–26). With a clear sense of irony, Jesus refers (v. 23) to 'this mountain being cast into the sea' (Waetjen 1989:185). Finally, the chief priests, scribes and elders ask Jesus (vv. 27–28) on whose authority he has done these things (presumably referring to the temple incident). In his defence, Jesus poses a counterquestion about whether the baptismal ministry of John was divinely inspired or of human origin (vv. 29–30), leaving his opponents stumped for an answer (v. 31). Their refusal to express an opinion allows Jesus, in return, to be silent on the issue of his own authority (v. 33). Following a further parable (Mk 12:1–11) with signs of a divided audience and growing enmity (Mk 12:12), Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees and Herodians, with a question about taxation (Mk 12:13–17), which, I suggest, is more intimately related to the overturning of the banker's tables, than sometimes appears at first sight. The pericope ends with Jesus' words: 'Give to Caesar the things which belong to Caesar! Give to God those things which belong to God!' (Mk 12:17). A strong sense of insider-outsider conflict pervades all these verses and this is typical of all four Gospels and John, in particular (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:238–240).

John's account

In typical Jewish fashion, John speaks about going up to Jerusalem (Jn 2:13). Jesus enters the temple and, according to verse 14, *finds there* sellers of oxen, sheep and doves, and the seated changers of money (κερματιστὰς). Like Mark (11:11), John may be suggesting that there may be something unusual about the presence of some of these merchants, in line perhaps with the thinking of Eppstein (1964), namely, that their presence has to do with a recent innovation of Caiaphas, and was not the norm.

Verse 15 brings a note of anger into the equation as Jesus makes a 'scourge of cords' (φραγέλλιον ἐκ σχοινίων). John alone mentions the casting out of animals; for the Synoptic Gospels, it was 'those buying and selling' (Mk 11:15; Mt 21:12) or 'the merchants' (Lk 19:45). John speaks of Jesus telling those selling doves to leave (in Mk 11:15 and Mt 21:12 they were unseated).

John records (2:15) that Jesus 'poured out' (ξέχεε) the change (τὸ κέρμα – literally 'clippings' – a *hapax legomenon*) of the money changers (τῶν κολλυβιστῶν) and overthrew their tables'

(τὰς τραπέζας ἀνέστρεψε). John uses two terms τοὺς κερματιστὰς (in 2:14) and τῶν κολλυβιστῶν (in 2:16) while the Synoptics (Mt 21:12 and Mk 11:15) use(s) – τῶν κολλυβιστῶν. In addition, Matthew contributes a third term (Mt 25:27 – τοῖς τραπέζιταις) which may be rendered as banker (from table). Sperber (2013) suggests that each of these terms refers to a different aspect of the role of temple merchants, namely giving change (κερματιστὰς – literally small cuttings), changing foreign currency (κολλυβιστῶν) and banking (τραπέζιταις – for a table).

Instead of driving out the sellers of doves, as in Mark, Jesus orders these merchants to leave (v. 16) with the command: 'Do not make my Father's house into a house of merchandise' (οἶκον ἐμπορίου – an emporium or place of merchandise), perhaps an allusion to Zechariah (14:21; see Catchpole 1984). John ends the intervention (v. 17) with the disciples remembering a prophetic word (Ps 69:9) and posing a question about his authority (What sign? v. 18), which leads Jesus to prophesy the destruction of 'this temple' (vv. 19–22).

John juxtaposes the disciples, and their post-resurrection response (v. 22), with the Jewish leaders' literal understanding (v. 20) – one of several instances of Johannine irony (Duke 1985). An editorial note connects the statement with the body of Jesus (v. 21; see Carson 1991:175–180) related perhaps to the Johannine notion of Jesus replacing the temple (Carson 1991:180–183). John uses simply 'the Jews' or better 'the Judeans' as the protagonists of Jesus at the temple, which is in line with the developing antagonism found in the Fourth Gospel. In their interpretation of the Temple events, Malina and Rohrbaugh refer to the model of antisociety (1998:74) drawn from sociolinguistics (cf. Halliday & Mathiessen 2004). Elsewhere Malina and Rohrbaugh (1998:238–239) refer to the marked rift between insiders and outsiders found extensively in John's Gospel. Such intention to cause division, in the intended audience, is common to the earlier prophetic literature (Stulman 1995) and often exacerbated by the use of irony (Sharp 2009).

The big picture

The primary task of the money changers was changing coins into Tyrian Tetradrachms (shekel) or drachms (half shekel). Jewish law (m. Megil 29a–b) mandated the annual offering (beginning in the month of Adar, the month before Passover) of a half shekel per adult Jewish man dating back to earlier centuries (m. Sheq 1:3). The Mishna makes provision for between 4% – 8% to be charged on half shekels (m. Sheq 1:6). Should the payer pay for two people (with a full shekel), no surcharge was charged (m. Sheq 1:7). In one of the caches of coins discovered, the value of the Roman coins, in denarii, equals 8% of the 1000 half shekels found, and excluding the 3400 full shekels (Kadman 1962). There was a clear preference for the more valuable denarii of Augustus over the inflated denarii of Nero (Kadman 1962). In Neusner's (1989:287–290), discussion of the money changers he points out that the money was intended for the daily whole offerings, which served as the expiation for the sins of Israel, following Exodus 30:16 (t. Shek 1:6). The coins appear to have been used in Jerusalem

from about 126 BCE to about 66 CE (Authority 2008). Neither the surcharge nor the exchange appears to be problematic – raising again the question of Jesus' intervention in the temple.

Horsley (1987) sees the action of Jesus as an attack on the political and economic interests which coalesced in the Jerusalem Temple. He sums up the situation as follows:

Jesus was attacking not the things peripheral to the system, but integral parts of it. Moreover, these activities that were operated and controlled by the aristocratic priestly families must have been points at which the domination and exploitation of the people was most obvious. (p. 300)

Herzog speaks of the 'exploitative and oppressive domination of the people through taxation and tribute' which 'represent the real social-banditry of the time, even though it was marked as piety and religious obligation' (Goodman 1987; Herzog 1992:820; Tan 1997; Waetjen 1989).

Borg and Crossan (2008) list three problems, which we may describe as spectral shadows in the background to the temple event, namely 'political oppression, economic exploitation and religious legitimization' (2008: 7–8). They point out that the temple was the epicentre of 'both a local and an imperial tax system' together with a system of tithes, not forgetting the annual temple tax of half a shekel (Borg & Crossan 2008:18). To complicate matters further as the economic centre 'of the domination system, records of debts were stored in the temple' (Borg & Crossan 2008:18).

Evans (2013) adds a further consideration:

What many moderns may not know is that the provincial tribute tax was collected and housed in the treasury building on the Temple Mount. The peaceful collection of this tax was one of the primary responsibilities of the high priest and his high-ranking priestly associates. (p. 105)

Since both Roman and Priestly taxes were stored in the temple, the traditional symbolic meaning of the temple was undoubtedly in jeopardy. The emerging consensus has the temple hierarchy, together with their employees constituting what Malina and Rohrbaugh call 'the center of a redistributive economy in which the economic surplus was effectively drained from the rural areas' (1998:74). The temple also had symbolic value as the 'control center for the deity's dealings with the world' (m. Kelim 1:6–9; see Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:78).

Taking the action of Jesus in its parabolic form reminds us of some of the deeds of the ancient prophets (see Mt 21:10–11), including Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Elijah and Elisha sagas. Jesus is seen to quote from Jeremiah (7:11), and Isaiah (56:7), and there are possible allusions to Zechariah (14:21; see Catchpole 1984) and perhaps even Malachi (3:1–5). The use of irony and the indications of shame and honour and insider and outsider tensions (Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:74–75) are all reminiscent of the prophetic writings making appropriate descriptions like 'prophetic symbolism' (Borg & Crossan 2008:47–48), or in the words of Cranfield, 'a parabolic action' (1977:356).

Four essential pieces of the puzzle

Over the last five decades, there have been four notable articles written on the temple intervention. Each, in their own way, has offered new answers, and in so doing, has created new and important questions. Without these four articles, the study of Jesus in the temple would be infinitely poorer. However, each insight needs to be tested in the light of the emerging consensus of Jesus' parabolic action, set against the social and political oppression of the time.

Victor Eppstein and the temple markets

Eppstein (1964) considered the presence of animals for sale on the temple mount (as mentioned in Jn 2:15), excluding doves (m. Kirtut 1:7), as an innovation of Caiaphas. In reaction to the Pharisaic control of the main markets located on the Mount of Olives, Caiaphas decided to open a rival market on the temple mount itself. In Eppstein's opinion, Caiaphas had his own commercial interests in mind. Jesus, finding these innovations in place, perhaps for the first time, then reacted on the spur of the moment. The theory has recently received significant, if qualified support (Betz 1997:461–462, 467–469; Chilton 1994:172–176; Evans 2013:429–432; Klawans 2006:232–232; Murphy-O'Connor 2012:64).

Taking another view of the presence of traders in the temple grounds, A.Y. Collins (2001) suggests that Jesus was objecting to the transformation of the temple area into a Roman-style agora by Herod's renovations. The enormous size of the temple courtyards, as one of Herod's innovations, probably lent itself to various priestly innovations, not all of them in the interests of the ordinary worshipper. Once such a spacious area was available for use, one could imagine an enterprising mind like that of Caiaphas, seeing its commercial potential.

Neill Hamilton and the function of banking in the temple

Hamilton (1964), in his important article, revealed for the first time the extent of the commercial interests of the Jerusalem temple. Using references drawn from a wide array of Jewish sources, he painted a clear picture of the various ways in which the temple functioned as a bank (1964:366–369), including the granting of loans (1964:369). He then turned to a consideration of Jesus' action in the temple (1964:370), and concluded that by his actions, Jesus suspended the commercial operations of the temple and thereby proclaimed himself king (1964:371). Why did he act in this way? Hamilton considered that Zechariah 14:21 may lie behind the Gospel accounts. Jesus was preparing for the coming reign of God (1964:372). He concludes:

The death of Jesus of Nazareth had little to do with messianic claims or lack of messianic recognition. It was pure tragedy. An eschatological prophet acting under the obligations of his message came into collision with civil authorities who also had their obligations. (p. 372)

Hamilton's research has engendered considerable interest in the banking side of the temple business (Davies 2001; Evans 1989; Oakman 2012; Perrin 2010; Tan 1997). The use of temples as banks, and the banking terms used, has a rich Hellenistic background (Amemiya 2007:102–106; Davies 2001; Schaper 1995). The original sources are most informative: Josephus, for example, tells us that the temple of Jerusalem was extremely wealthy (e.g. *JW* 5.5.6; 5.5.4 and *Ant* 15.11.3) and with its copious storerooms the temple held a significant amount of private valuables – housed there for safe keeping (*JW* 5.5.6; 5.5.4; 7:5:5; *Ant* 15.11.13; see also 2 Macc 3:4–6, 10–15; 4 Macc 4:1–3, 7); and for loans (m. Shek 4.3).

The widows of the High Priests were beneficiaries of extremely generous pensions paid right out of the Temple treasury (b. Ketub 65a; 66b; Lam Rab 1:50–51[on 1:16]; b. Git 56a) (Evans 1989:524; see also Oakman 2012:92–93, 104; Perrin 2010:80–109; Tan 1997:169–174).

In addition, the temple or some adjacent storage facility housed the records of debts (Josephus, *War* 2:17:6) – an undoubted thorn in the side of many Galileans, Samaritans and Judeans.

Oakman underlines the negative consequences of policies of monetisation and marketisation generally on the peasants of Galilee and Judaea (Oakman 2012:39, 84–91). Categorically, he claims 'ancient banking served elite interests and ordinarily had more to do with tax payments, money exchange and commercial transactions' and adds, 'Mark 11:15 is consistent with this picture' (Oakman 2012:87). He concludes:

Given Jesus' concerns for Passover and the bankers' tables as symbols of commerce and agrarian debt, the temple episode expresses a pointed protest against the temple as an institution of agrarian exploitation and crass commercial enterprise. (p. 104; see Bauckham 1988:88; Malina & Rohrbaugh 1998:78–79)

Consequently, the temple as institution could not yield the fruit that was expected from it in and out of season; hence the parabolic action of cursing the unproductive fig tree (Mk 11:13–14).

Craig Evans and the high-priestly corruption

Craig Evans' work on the temple intervention took the form of a paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) and published in the collection of selected papers from that congress (Evans 1989). Evans gathered together a significant number of Jewish sources to show that the high-priestly aristocracy were widely perceived to be both extremely wealthy and corrupt. Most striking of all was his exposure of the so-called 'woes' against the high-priestly families of the 1st century CE (t. Menah 13.21; Evans 1989:525–527). In this way, Evans offered ample grounds for Jesus' actions in the Jerusalem temple. Jesus was, like the prophets of old, standing firmly on the justice of God and challenging what he believed to be the injustices of the time (1989:535–539).

In the years which followed, Evans has continued to add to our understanding of the high-priestly aristocracy (Evans 2013;

Evans & Wright 2009 to mention just a few of the articles and books). Recently (2013:531), he concluded that 'greed, nepotism, oppression, and violence according to the rabbis characterised the high-priestly families (Sipre Deut 105 [on 14:22] y. Pe'a 2:16).' He added that the wealth of the high priests was legendary: 'Incredible sums were paid as dowries (b. Ketub 66b) and allowances for perfumes and jewellery (b. Yoma 39b; m. Kelim 12.7; m. Sab 6.5)' (Evans 2013:531; see also Josephus (*Ant* 20.8.8 & 20.9.2). In similar vein, Perrin (2010:80–109) compares the rabbinic reasons for the fall of the first temple ('idolatry, licentiousness, and bloodshed' [t. Menah 13:22B]), with their suggested reasons for the fall of the second temple ('because they loved money and hated one another' [t. Menah 13:22D]). The general picture of priestly oppression, described here, is borne out by other scholars (Goodman 1987; Oakman 2012; Perrin 2010).

Peter Richardson and the imagery of the Tyrian Shekel

Richardson's original contribution, like that of Evans, was in the form of a paper presented at the North American Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) congress (Richardson 1992). The paper was subsequently republished as a chapter in an edited collection of his work (Richardson 2004). Richardson begins with an incident in the temple, which happened in 4 CE, where the students of two Pharisaic teachers attempted to remove the Roman eagle at the entrance to the Temple (2004:241–242). With reference to the Tyrian shekel, he describes its idolatrous imagery and takes note of its high silver content and compares the coin with the coins minted during the Jewish Revolt (66–70 CE), with their more orthodox images (2004:247). He comments on Jesus' use of Jeremiah 7:11 and refers, in passing, to the mention of Baal, in the same sermon (Jr 7:9; 2004:249). He argues that the temple tax was a comparatively recent piece of legislation, without clear Torah support, which included two new innovations. The first innovation was the use of the Tyrian coin, chosen for its silver content. The second innovation was the frequency of the payment. This met with resistance from the Qumran community, who argued that it should only be paid once in a person's lifetime (4Q159). Richardson adds that both innovations 'could be thought to be relatively recent and both equally unacceptable' to Jesus and some other Jews (2004:248).

Richardson concludes (2004:250–252), on the basis of Matthew (17:24–27) and Mark (12:13–17), that Jesus was opposed, not to the tax itself, but to the particular coins used to pay the half shekel tax and viewed them as idolatrous (2004:250). To use such coins was like making an offering to a pagan god in the Temple of Yahweh. Jesus did not want the tax abolished or replaced (as Tan 1997 would later argue) nor was he concerned about temple purity, rather he was motivated by 'a reformer's anger at recognition of other gods' (Richardson 2004:251).

Richardson's article served, quite correctly, to draw attention to the temple shekel. Several discoveries of quantities of

Tyrian shekels (including half and quarter) have been found, in 1960 on Mount Carmel (Kadman 1962); at Qumran (Magness 2002:188–193, 206–207); from an unknown site in 2008 (Marian & Sermarini 2013); Gamla and Silwan (Richardson 2004:243) and from a Jerusalem excavation conducted by Ronnie Reich and Eli Shukron near the City of David (Authority 2008). The sheer volume of buried coins in different locations, suggests that these were hidden during the Jewish Revolt (66–70 CE). All of the images for the Tyrian shekel (regardless of size) are the same. The description is as follows:

The shekel that was found in the excavation weighs 13 grams, bears the head of Melqrt, the chief deity of the city of Tyre on the obverse (equivalent to the Semitic god Baal) and an eagle upon a ship's prow on the reverse (Authority 2008:n.p.),

or put differently, with a winged imperial Ptolemaic eagle (Marian & Sermarini 2013).

Richardson's thesis has received a literal barrage of negative comment, in particular from Chilton (1994), followed by Klawans (2006). In essence, they argue that there is no evidence for the idea that Jesus critiqued idol worship, especially in the discourses which follow the temple incident; that the Tyrian coins were considered by 1st century Judaism as 'tolerated imagery' (noting the presence of Tyrian shekels at Qumran) and conclude that the coins were, ultimately, more acceptable than the Roman coins with the images of the Caesar (Chilton 1994:172–176; Klawans 2006:231–232). Where Richardson based his case on the literal evidence of the Tyrian coins, his critics bring forward no evidence, other than the silence of the texts (New Testament, Mishnaic or Talmudic). Further criticism stems from Gray (2010:27), who argues that Richardson has set his case on speculation about the agenda of the historical Jesus, rather than the plot of Mark and that he ignores the rest of the temple actions, including the driving out of the buyers and sellers.

Apart from the imagery on the shekel, other New Testament scholars have drawn attention to problems surrounding the collection of the tax (cf. Mt 17:24–27). Horsley, writing on Jewish and Roman tax (1987:279–284), comments on the half shekel tax as 'controversial in Jesus' time' referring to Josephus (*JW* 6.335 and *Antiq* 18.312) and Philo (*Spec Leg* 1:77–78) (1987:280). Tan (1997:174–179) has argued that Jesus was against the temple tax in principle, and wanted to see it abolished. Murphy-O'Connor discusses the possible alternatives open to the Jewish hierarchy, like the Roman coins from Antioch, Caesarea, Gaza or Ashkelon. Such coins, however, were the coins of an occupying power and were used to pay Roman taxes. He argues that 'it would be symbolically inappropriate to use such coinage in the temple and in particular to pay for the national sacrifice' (Murphy-O'Connor 2012:63). In addition, in favour of these Tyrian coins, there was their high silver content, the consistent quality and the fact that Tyre was an autonomous mint. These economic and political factors, Murphy-O'Connor believes, in the eyes of the Jewish authorities outweighed the problem

with the imagery on the coins and the superscription 'Tyre the holy and the inviolate' (2012:63). For the pious Jews, who had no option in the matter, this would have been a problem. He concludes that 'Jesus did what at least some Jews in the 1st century would have wanted to do' (2012:63). Such a conclusion, by an eminent scholar, leads me to suggest that we need to investigate the issue of the Tyrian shekel more closely.

Revisiting the Tyrian shekel

There are three key questions which need careful consideration. What did the Jews of the 1st century think about coins with human imagery? Does the teaching of Jesus contain allusions to idol worship? Does the idea of Jesus reacting to idol worship (specifically the worship of Baal) fit into the overall plot of Mark's Gospel?

The Jewish view of coins with human imagery

The first criticism aimed at Richardson's thesis (1992) argues that the Jews of Jesus' time would have accepted the Tyrian shekel as 'tolerated imagery' (Chilton 1994:172–176; Klawans 2006:231–232). This comment does not square with the evidence of history. In almost every instance of the issuing of coins by Jewish authorities, from the time of the Hasmoneans, through to Herod Antipas and beyond, including the revolt of 66–70 CE, followed by the Bar-Kochba revolt, the imagery on the coins deliberately avoids living creatures, preferring on the whole floral motifs, or images of the temple. This is in strict observance of the ban on creating the images of any living thing in Exodus (20:1–6). One exception to the rule is the coins of Philip, Herod's son. In commenting on the difference between the two sons of Herod, Jensen writes, that Herod Antipas, ruler of Galilee, produced five series of coins issues, 'none of them has any figural images, showing his respectful observance of the Jewish ban against graven images' (2012:46). He limited his coins to 'floral motifs', palm branches and lulavs. His brother Herod Philip, 'however, frequently issued coins bearing his own portrait or that of the emperor, as well as other pagan symbols' (Jensen 2012:46). Clearly, the debate about the imagery on coins was alive and well in 1st century Roman Palestine, and therefore it is unlikely that the temple shekels were not included in the debate.

Jesus and the issue of idolatry

The second criticism argues that Jesus does not address the issue of idolatry (Chilton 1994:172–176; Klawans 2006: 231–232). Freyne (2014) and Betz (1997) clearly disagree. In Freyne's discussion of the temple interaction, he focuses on Jesus' quotation of Jeremiah (7:11) by developing the full argument of that sermon as relevant to the Jesus' event. In particular, Freyne mentions the implied breaking of the Decalogue (2014:180) and the worship of false gods, found in Jeremiah (7:1–12), but without referring to the imagery on the shekels. In similar vein, Betz (1997) speaks of the temple event as Jesus' response to 'commercialism in the Temple area as a form of Romanization and *paganization* of

the Jewish religion' (1997:469, my emphasis). According to Betz, Jesus presented two different kinds of temple worship so that: 'A choice had to be made between true worship as prayer and the commercialism now dominating the Temple cult' (1997:469). Betz then refers to Jesus' logia on the choice between God and Mammon (Mt 6:24; see Rosner 2007 on greed and idolatry). He concludes, in reference to Jesus' interaction in the temple, that 'the true worship of God is set in stark opposition to serving Mammon, the demonic personification of materialism' (Betz 1997:470). Clearly for both Freyne (2014) and Betz (1997), the temple commerce, in and of itself, carried overtones of idolatry and this was reflected in Jesus' use of Jeremiah 7.

By quoting Jeremiah 7:11, the Gospel writers would be aware of the context, namely Jeremiah's own confrontation with the priestly hierarchy, a point cogently made by Borg (2006: 234–236). Jeremiah is given a message by Yahweh, which he is to deliver on the threshold of the temple (Jr 7:2) to those who enter to worship Yahweh. The sermon begins with a call for repentance so that the people might continue to 'live in this place' (Jr 7:3). Here as elsewhere, the words of Jeremiah resonate with Jesus' predictions about the fall of Jerusalem (Mk 13:1–2; cf. Borg 2006:235).

Jeremiah warns against lying words about the Temple of Yahweh (7:4), and calls for people to amend their ways and deeds and to do justice (7:5), not oppressing the sojourner, the fatherless and the widow, nor shedding innocent blood in this place, nor walking after other gods (7:6). Again Jeremiah reiterates the promise – such a life will allow the people of Judah to enjoy this land, given by God (Jr 7:7). He poses a question:

Will you steal, murder and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense to Baal, and walk after other unknown gods (7:9) then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are delivered; that we may do all these abominations? (7:10)

Then come the words spoken by Jesus, 'Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes?' and the conclusion 'Behold, I, even I, have seen it, says Yahweh' (Jr 7:11). Then follows Jeremiah's prediction – that the Jerusalem temple would share the fate of the sanctuary at Shiloh (7:12–14) – it would be destroyed. As an aside, we note that Jesus was not the only one to use Jeremiah 7 in relation to the Temple worship, as Jesus ben Ananias did the same (JW 6.300–305 quoted by Evans & Wright 2009:7).

Borg (2006) sums up the meaning of Jesus' use of Jeremiah 7:11, saying:

Thus when Jesus called the temple 'a den of robbers', he was not referring to the activity of the money changers and sellers of sacrificial animals. Rather, he indicted the temple authorities as robbers who collaborated with the robbers at the top of the imperial domination system. (p. 235)

I would add that both temple authorities and the imperial government collaborated to ensure that temple tax was

paid in the best quality silver coin available, regardless of the imagery on the coins. Such an action was clearly in the interest of the ruling authorities, and carried obvious negative implications for the Jewish peasantry of Galilee and Judaea.

The shekel in the context of Mark's Gospel

I suggest that there are good reasons to connect Jesus' overturning of the tables and the imagery on the coins with the general plot of Mark's Gospel. Following closely on Jesus' intervention in the temple, comes a debate about coins (Mk 12:13–17). With regard to the Roman denarii, Jesus asked 'Whose image is this?' and received the expected answer, 'Caesar's'. Jesus may well have done the same with the Tyrian shekel, with embarrassing results for the high-priestly aristocracy as hypothetically they answered 'Baal'. By locating the debate around Caesar's image close to the temple cleansing, Mark has maintained a sense of the irony in Jesus' question – 'Whose image is this?' (Mk 12:16.)

There is more. The moment of Jesus' decision to visit Jerusalem and to meet his death takes place, according to Mark (9:2–9) on an unnamed mountain. There Jesus is transfigured and meets with two great heroes of faith Elijah and Moses. The incident is enigmatic and so difficult to interpret. However, in terms of Mark's plot, one thing is clear – namely, from this point onwards, the stage is set for a confrontation between Jesus and the ruling authorities.

In the light of the Tyrian shekels, the transfiguration has added significance. For Mark's audience, accustomed as many of them were to paying the temple shekel, the connection would have been absolutely clear. Moses, on Mount Sinai received the Ten Commandments, including the prohibition on the worship of other gods (Ex 20:1–3), and the making of graven images (Ex 20:4–6). Elijah, on another mountain (Mt Carmel – 1 Ki 18:20–40) took on the prophets of Baal and defeated them. Since the Baal, with whom he contended, was in all likelihood the Tyrian Baal introduced by Jezebel (see 1 Ki 16:29–33; see Bronner 1968:8–11), the connection with the Tyrian shekel is even more meaningful. Inspired by the vision of these two great champions of pure Yahwism, Jesus is determined to go to Jerusalem and to take on the establishment – for both its oppression and its failure to give honour to Yahweh alone.

Conclusion

Every element of the temple commerce, whether sacrifice, banking or the coins involved, offers some rationale for the actions of Jesus. Taken together, the composition is striking and offers more than enough reason for Jesus to enact his parabolic intervention. In driving out the merchants and bankers, Jesus does what the high priest, in the interests of maintaining holiness, should have done, so there is an implicit irony there – which is mirrored in Jesus' reference to the House of Prayer (Mk 11:17 quoting Is 56:7). The High

Priest has chosen Mammon, instead of God. In his greed, he has chosen silver over obeying the Decalogue, with dire consequences for ordinary peasants. That the payment of the coin is tied to the daily sin offering (Neusner 1989) comes close to religious blackmail.

Because of the threat of potential merging of God and Mammon, in a form of priestly hegemony, we may speak of a sense of dissonance, which, I believe, the actions of Jesus sought to create. The mark of this dissonance was the division between insider and outsider which arose from the implied and explicit irony and the enacted parable which accompanied the spoken words of Jesus. Like the prophets of old, Jesus sought to drive a wedge between the essential symbolism of the temple as the House of God and those who used the temple to further their own commercial interests, to the detriment of the ordinary peasants.

In spilling the idolatrous coins on the ground Jesus does what any righteous Jew should have done (Murphy-O'Connor 2012:63). At this point, Jesus resembles Elijah standing face to face with the prophets of the Tyrian Baal introduced by Jezebel. This is Jesus' personal Mount Carmel, presaged by the transfiguration perhaps, as he upsets the tables and the unholy coins of the Tyrian Baal-Melkart roll across the dusty floors of the temple. Bearing in mind the Mishnaic rules (m Sheq 7:1) about dropped coins, perhaps some of these coins even ended up in the poor box (Freewill gifts m. Sheq 7:1; cf. Mk 12:41).

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