

Jesus and the Temple

In the Challenge of Jesus, N T Wright raises the questions of what did Jesus think of the current temple, and what did he want to replace it with?

It is clear that Jesus prophesied the fall of the Temple and saw this as being part of God's judgement. This is seen most clearly in his temple action (Mark 11:15-17).

¹⁵ *Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, **and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves;*** ¹⁶ *and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple.*¹⁷ *He was teaching and saying, "Is it not written,*

'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations'?

But you have made it a den of robbers."

In the past God moved prophets to give small 'demonstrations' of what was in store for Israel. Below are examples from Ezekiel, Hosea and Jeremiah.

Action (Ezekiel 4)

And you, O mortal, take a brick and set it before you. On it portray a city, Jerusalem; ² and put siegeworks against it, and build a siege wall against it, and cast up a ramp against it; set camps also against it, and plant battering rams against it all around.

Explanation (Ezekiel 4)

This is a sign for the house of Israel.

Action (Ezekiel 5)

One third of the hair you shall burn in the fire inside the

city, when the days of the siege are completed; one third you shall take and strike with the sword all around the city; [a] and one third you shall scatter to the wind, and I will unsheathe the sword after them

Explanation (Ezekiel 5)

One third of you shall die of pestilence or be consumed by famine among you; one third shall fall by the sword around you; and one third I will scatter to every wind and will unsheathe the sword after them.

Action (Hosea 1)

When the Lord first spoke through Hosea, the Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take for yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom,

Explanation (Hosea 1)

for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord."

Action (Hosea 1)

Then the Lord said to him, "Name her Lo-ruhamah, [b]

Explanation (Hosea 1)

for I will no longer have pity on the house of Israel or forgive them.

Action (Hosea 3)

The Lord said to me again, "Go, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress

Explanation (Hosea 3)

Just as the Lord loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes.

Action (Jeremiah 27)

Thus the Lord said to me: Make yourself a yoke of straps and bars, and put them on your neck.

Explanation (Jeremiah 27)

But any nation that will bring its neck under the yoke of the

king of Babylon and serve him, I will leave on its own land, says the Lord, to till it and live there.

Action (Jeremiah 19)

¹⁰ *Then you shall break the jug in the sight of those who go with you,* ¹¹ *and shall say to them:*

Explanation (Jeremiah 19)

Thus says the Lord of hosts: So will I break this people and this city, as one breaks a potter's vessel, so that it can never be mended. In Topheth they shall bury until there is no more room to bury.

The action was clear. Now what was the explanation?

From Mark's gospel. The temple action is flanked by the cursing of the fig tree.

He said to it, "May no one ever eat fruit from you again." And his disciples heard it. JUDGEMENT and DESTRUCTION

*Truly I tell you, if you say to **this mountain**, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and if you do not doubt in your heart, but believe that what you say will come to pass, it will be done for you. DESTRUCTION?*

And later...

³⁰ *Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin? Answer me." – Implication: HE IS THE MESSIAH*

And then:

What then will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants and give the vineyard to others. ¹⁰ Have you not read this scripture:

*'The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone; [a]*

¹¹ *this was the Lord's doing,
and it is amazing in our eyes'?"*

Implication: Judgement, destruction and replacement

A little later in Mark 13 we have this clearly stated:
As he came out of the temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what large stones and what large buildings!" ² *Then Jesus asked him, "Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."*

If the temple is to be destroyed, with what will it be replaced?

The answer to this seems to be in Mark 14:

²² *While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body."* ²³ *Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it.* ²⁴ *He said to them, "This is my blood of the [g] covenant, which is poured out for many."* ²⁵ *Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."*

In place of the temple cult through which sins were forgiven will be Jesus body and blood.

That Jesus will also replace the temple lines up with:
*"The stone that the builders rejected
has become the cornerstone;"*

This is told in the parable of the tenants regarding the murdered Son. In Hebrew Son (Ben) and Stone (Eben) sound similar. So this is equivalent to something like: the Son who was rejected has become the new focal point, even the new temple. This though was mentioned in secret and would have take a while for the disciples to understand.

Another strand is the presence of Jesus which he promises to those who meet in his name 18:19-20. Also Mt 28:20. Similar to the presence of God found in the temple.

For more on symbolic action in the Hebrew Bible see <https://rsc.byu.edu/archived/sperry-symposium-classics-old-testament/symbolic-action-prophecy-old-testament>