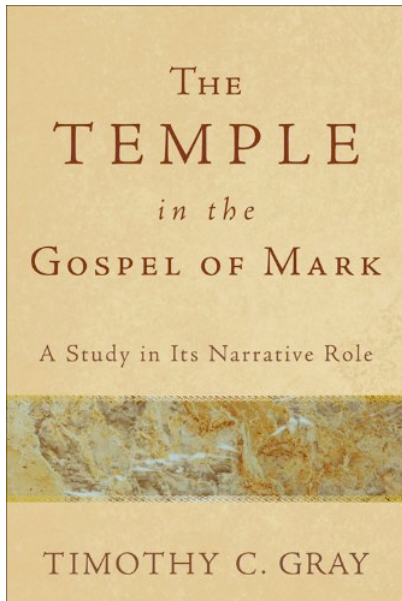


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Gray, Timothy C.

The Temple in the Gospel of Mark: A Study in Its Narrative Role

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The volume under review is a reprint of the author's dissertation, written under the direction of Francis Moloney, which was first published in 2008 by Mohr Siebeck in Tübingen (WUNT 2/242). The reprint by Baker Academic is meant to be a more affordable edition, primarily for the American market (Mohr Siebeck: €49.00; Baker Academic: \$42.99). Apart from the binding, this edition is printed on (partly) recycled paper, which feels a bit rougher than the Mohr Siebeck edition. For the same reason, the print appears slightly less sharp and clear, but the difference is barely perceptible (said by a spectacled reader!).

As Gray explains in his introductory remarks (1–10), his study is situated within the field of narrative criticism. He distinguishes this clearly from redaction criticism as an approach that stresses the redactor's work, that is, everything that does not belong to the sources used. His approach is a more holistic one, as it were, which allows him to treat Mark 11–15 as a whole without having to discuss diachronic questions of tradition and redaction.

Without much further introduction, Gray enters *in medias res* with his first chapter ("Demonstration in the Temple," 1–45). He observes that the parts that are set in

Jerusalem are of particular importance for Mark, since the pace of the narrative slows down at the beginning of chapter 11. The episode traditionally called “the cleansing of the temple” (Mark 11:15–19), then, is to be seen in close connection with the cursing of the fig tree (11:12–14, 20–25), which frames it (one prime instance of Mark’s famous “sandwiching technique”). In this perspective, Jesus’ action is not just protest against certain cases of bad practice in the administration of the temple but a full-fledged prophetic condemnation of the temple and its cult. However, this overall view comes with a number of exegetical decisions that one may not always find compelling, such as the *σχεύος* of Mark 11:16 referring explicitly to cultic devices or the “robbers” in Mark 11:17, cited from Jer 7:11, being a reference to the Zealots who occupied the temple precincts in 68–70 C.E. (although it is certainly worthwhile to read Mark’s temple references with the Jewish War in view).

In the passages that follow (Mark 11:22–12:44), the temple theme seems to be less prominent, but Gray manages to elaborate it in his second chapter (“Lord of the Temple,” 46–93). Not only is the temple the place of Jesus’ teaching; “this mountain” (11:23) is identified by the context as the Temple Mount—one more element of Jesus’ unqualified condemnation of the temple. Similarly, the parable of the wicked tenants (12:1–12), being told in the temple precincts, must refer to the temple. This reference is enforced by the appended quotation from Ps 118:22–23, which points to Jesus as the cornerstone of the new temple. The connection between the parable and this quotation is indeed hardly natural, so one may see some merit in the connection Gray draws. Remarkable, too, is his rich elaboration of the motif of the temple’s cornerstone in the Old Testament. On the whole, Gray reads all of Mark 12 as focused on Jesus’ authority as the one who has come to collect the “fruit” produced in God’s “vineyard.”

The third chapter (“Prophetic Eschatology and Mark 13,” 94–155) is a reading of Mark’s apocalyptic chapter as referring not generally to the end of the world but precisely to the temple’s demise. This is the lesson to be learned “from the fig tree” (13:28), as it were, whereas the “fig tree” refers back to that of Mark 11:12–14, 20–21. Gray identifies the possible Old Testament backgrounds of Mark 13 as prophetic oracles against Jerusalem and the temple, which further supports his case for a precise focus on the temple. He can even integrate the cosmic language in much of Mark 13 into this reading, as he refers to the cosmic symbolism of the temple buildings and equipment: if the temple symbolizes the world, then its destruction points beyond the mere military event to the end of the world.

In chapter 4 (“Eschatology and the Death of Christ,” 156–97), Gray analyzes Mark 14–15 as a story of Jesus himself replacing the temple. Thus, quite unusually, he interprets the Last Supper in Mark as setting up an alternative cultic practice in opposition to—or

rather, replacing—cultic worship in the temple. Connections between the Gethsemane scene and the discourse of Mark 13 (e.g., the exhortation to watch) are pointed out. In Jesus' trial, the charges are false only insofar as Jesus did not speak of himself as the one to destroy the temple, but it is clear that his prophetic pronouncement and action against the temple are at the core of the trial. Finally, the tearing veil (15: 38) provides a clear connection between the death of Jesus and the destruction of the temple. In Mark's view, Gray argues, the temple's demise has virtually taken place at the moment of Jesus' death; the events of 70 C.E. are only an "aftershock" (192). On a further level, the tearing veil with its cosmic symbolism also stands for the end of the old and the beginning of the new creation.

The results of this study are briefly summarized in the "Final Conclusion" (198–200), which is followed by a short bibliography (201–7) and indexes of ancient sources (209–20), modern authors (221–23), and subjects and key terms (224–26).

On the whole, Gray makes a consistent case based on detailed exegesis, but the consistency comes at a price: not all of his exegetical decisions are equally convincing, and some appear even somewhat arbitrary. This is the case, for instance, when the reference to the new temple "made without hands" (*ἀχειροποίητος*, Mark 14:58) is seen as "strikingly parallel" (176) to the stone in Dan 2:34–35 that was cut from the mountain "by no hand" (LXX: *ἄνευ χειρῶν*), and is then, with reference to Exod 20:25 (the altar to be built with unhewn [i.e., uncut] stones), suggested "to have some kind of cultic association" (176). Yet this midrashic tour de force through the Old Testament has little impact on the case Gray wishes to make. Similar observations could be made in numerous other cases when less than obvious connections to Old Testament texts are drawn.

Of course, these questions of detail always invite criticism, but it is Gray's merit that he proposes a consistent, focused reading of Mark 11–15 and suggests solutions for a number of exegetical riddles. It may be hoped that this book will stimulate further discussion.