

4.4 Jerusalem and the Temple in Luke-Acts

Jerusalem

A significant feature of the Gospel of Luke is the fact that the narrative presents Jesus as travelling to Jerusalem from chapters 9.51-19.44. Whatever happens in these chapters is happening 'on the way' up to Jerusalem. Luke presents a number of scenes in chapter 9 prior to Jesus' setting his face to Jerusalem: most significantly we find the first mentioning of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection (Lk 9.21-27) before he embarks on this journey. Prior to this, Peter's confession clearly expresses who this Jesus of Nazareth is (9.18-21), followed by Jesus' announcement of his suffering and death (9.22), a word on the cost of discipleship and the transfiguration of Jesus (9.28-36). The latter has been described as a scene which is parallel to the resurrection scenes depicting divine affirmation of Jesus who is seen in close association with the prophets Moses and Elijah who are associated with Messianic expectations in Second Temple Judaism (cf Tannehill pp.160-62).

The narrative of Luke-Acts clearly stresses the significance of Jerusalem, in that the Gospel of Luke begins with a scene in the Temple in Jerusalem (Lk 1. 8ff), has the newborn Jesus presented in the Temple in Jerusalem, then the long journey sequence, the passion, and the resurrection scenes are all located in Jerusalem. Moreover, the disciples re staying in Jerusalem awaiting the sending of the Spirit (Acts 1.12). Jerusalem is clearly the centre from which the message of Christ spreads throughout the world as is noted in Acts 1.8b 'and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.'

The passages in the Gospel which explicitly address Jerusalem are 13.33-35; 19.41-44; 21.20-24; 23.26-31. The dominant tune in these passages reveals a strong sense of pathos. Jesus speaks in anguished longing and lament (13.34) , he is weeping (19.41) and in 23.27ff the women weeping for Jesus are told to weep for their children and themselves, most likely a reference to the suffering of innocents during the war 66-70, upon which Luke looks retrospectively. The four scenes clearly build up the scene towards the crucifixion of Jesus. But rather than indicating that Jerusalem (which at the time of the writing of the Lucan work was destroyed) was seen as rejected or condemned, a sense of tragedy and disappointment permeates the words of Jesus. As the story unfolds further through Acts it becomes obvious that the fate Jesus suffers in Jerusalem is not the last word over the city.

The Temple

As already mentioned, the narrative of the Gospel begins in the Temple in Jerusalem (1.5ff), ends in the Temple (24.53) and also the Book of Acts attributes an ongoing significant role to the Temple, since even the apostle Paul is seen as acknowledging the significance of the Temple without criticism (e.g. Acts 21.26).

In the Temple the future salvation of Israel and the nations is associated with the baby Jesus (Lk 2.25ff), in the Temple the 12 year old Jesus participates in a teaching and learning conversation (2.46); in the Temple Jesus is tempted by the devil (4.9ff). Neither of these passages indicate that Jesus is seen as being in fundamental opposition to the Temple, nor is there the slightest hint of criticism against the function of the Temple in Israel's worshipping of God.

The scene which is often associated with a fundamental criticism of the Temple and its function as such is the cleansing of the Temple (19.45-46). It should be noted however that this cleansing is immediately followed by the emphasis that Jesus was teaching daily in the Temple 19.47-

21.37). Thus, rather than being a rejection of the Temple the cleansing is an action in the vein of a prophetic critique of misuse in its realm.

The reference to the destruction of the Temple in Lk 21.6 does not attribute this destruction to Jesus. Jesus here is not saying that 'he' will destroy the Temple. He refers to the fact that this Temple will be destroyed, a historical fact upon which the early Christ-followers looked back on hindsight. After the traumatic events of the Jewish-Roman war 66-70 Christ-followers, Jews and gentiles, and Jews tried to come to terms with these events and tried to re-gather their shattered lives as these events not only devastated Jerusalem, the Temple and left scars throughout Galilee and Judea but had repercussions in the Jewish Diaspora throughout the Roman Empire. The memory of Jerusalem's and the Temple's destruction was still painful for any who honoured Israel's tradition and respected the devout men and women who worshipped in the Temple.

The early Christ-followers tried to understand how in the context of their faith in Jesus as the Christ, the absence of the Temple and the presence of God were related. But Jesus is not seen as the replacement of a supposedly incomplete or even wrong worshipping of God in the Temple. As long as the Temple existed, the Christ-followers and Jesus are seen as true sons and daughters of Israel in their respect for the significance of Jerusalem and the Temple.

Issues raised in Acts in the speech of Stephen should be seen in this context as well and will be dealt with in Unit 6.

Useful Readings

'Temple Cleansing' in Reid Daniel G. ed. *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament: One Volume Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship*. Downers Grove, ILL: Intervarsity Press 2004, pp. 1067-1071.

Hamm, Dennis, 'The Tamid Service in Luke-Acts: The Cultic Background Behind Luke's Theology of Worship' in *CBQ* 25/2003, pp. 215-31.

Tomson Peter, 'Temple and Synagogue' and 'Liturgy and Calendar' in *'If This Be From Heaven...' Jesus and the New Testament Authors in Their Relationship to Judaism*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press 2001, pp. 71-81.

Tannehill, Robert L., *Luke*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon 1996, pp. 223-26; 282-86; 301-09; 338-9

Brawley, Robert L., 'Sadducees, Priests and the Temple' in *Luke-Acts and the Jews: Conflict, Apology and Conciliation*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press 1987, pp. 107-132.

Hogeterp, Albert, 'Jewish Attitudes to the Temple of Jerusalem from the Maccabees to Paul's Time' in *Paul and God's Temple*. Leuven: Peeters 2006, pp. 27-73

Hogeterp, Albert, 'The Early Christ-Movement and the Temple' in *Paul and God's Temple*. Leuven: Peeters 2006, pp. 115-193.

