

THE TEMPLE-THEME IN LUKE

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One of the most intriguing puzzles of Luke's Gospel is its emphasis on the temple. As René Laurentin has pointed out, it is somewhat striking that this theme frames the story.⁽¹⁾ Out of six episodes in Lk. 1–2, three take place in the temple: The Gospel opens with the angel's annunciation to Zechariah in the temple (Lk. 1:5–22); after Jesus' birth, he is taken to the temple (Lk. 2:22–39); and at the age of twelve, he is found by his parents at the temple (Lk. 2:41–50). In the same manner, the Gospel closes with this theme, so that after Jesus' ascension, the witnesses "returned to Jerusalem with great joy and were continually in the temple blessing God" (Lk. 24:53).

This emphasis on the temple seems peculiarly out of place in a Gospel that according to scholarly consensus was composed by a Gentile writing outside of Palestine after 70 A.D.⁽²⁾ Recognizing the problem and trying to show that the temple-theme was indigenous to a pre-70 Palestinian source, Lloyd Gaston resuscitated Proto-Luke.⁽³⁾ But as many have already indicated, the hypothesis of a pre-Markan Luke composed of Q and Luke's special materials runs aground at many points.⁽⁴⁾ For our purposes, and in critique of Gaston, it is enough to point out that he draws too heavily on Sahlin's theory that Lk. 1:5–3:7a was originally part of a Hebrew source. The connection of Lk. 1:2 with the rest of Luke is well established through the narrator's voice in the Gospel, which is consistently of the same type in Lk. 1:5–24:53.⁽⁵⁾ Furthermore, the temple theme is integral to the Gospel

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1. René Laurentin, *Jésus au temple: Mystère de Pâques et foi de Marie en Luc 2,48–50*. Etudes bibliques (Paris, 1966), p. 88. So also Augustin George, "Israel dans l'œuvre de Luc," *RB* 75 (1968):499; See G. W. H. Lampe, *St. Luke and the Church of Jerusalem* (London, 1969), pp. 3f.

2. H. Conzelmann, "Luke's Place in the Development of Early Christianity", in *Studies in Luke-Acts*, ed. L. Keck and J. L. Martyn (Nashville, 1966; reprint ed., Philadelphia, 1980), pp. 298f.; W. G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, 17th revised edition, trans. H. C. Kee (Nashville, 1975), pp. 147–151.

3. Lloyd Gaston, *No Stone On Another* (Leiden, 1970), pp. 244ff.; Paul Winter also thought that the temple material in Lk. 1–2 ultimately could be credited to an early source ("The Proto-Source of Luke i, ii," *NT* 1 (1956):184–199.

4. For a summary of the main arguments with a bibliography see, Kümmel, *Introduction*, pp. 131–35.

5. A recent thorough study is David S. Tam's, "The Literary and Theological Unity Between Lk. 1:2 and Lk. 3–Acts 28" (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1978).

structure as a whole and not only to the non-Markan sections of Luke. Conzelmann, especially, has demonstrated how by the omission of Mark's episode of the fig-tree, Luke has made the cleansing of the temple the goal of Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem (Lk. 19:28–48).⁽⁶⁾ Also, Laurentin has seen something similar in the allusions in Lk. 1–2 to Malachi's oracle concerning the Lord who comes to his temple to purify the sons of Levi (Mal. 3:1ff.).⁽⁷⁾ According to Laurentin, Jesus' enigmatic statement as a boy at the temple, οὐκ ᾔδείτε ὅτι ἐν τοῖς τοῦ πατρὸς μου δεξιναί με; (Lk. 2:49), previews his function as an adult: Jesus comes as the Son of God, who takes back and purifies God's temple.⁽⁸⁾ This dovetails with the Gospel-narrator's view that opposition to Jesus is centered at the temple and sets the stage for the death of Jesus at the hands of the chief priests and scribes, who ironically do not recognize the Son of God who is teaching daily in the temple. With Laurentin, there is a second irony as the work of God in taking back his temple is only completed through the Passion, which is forced in Luke by the temple-authorities' insistence that Jesus is not the Son of God (Lk. 22:66–71).⁽⁹⁾ Even if one theorizes, as Gaston did, that Proto-Luke would have been heavily edited by the Gospel's author, it is difficult to see how such a pervasive use of the temple-theme is anything less than a structural element of the gospel as a whole.⁽¹⁰⁾

But, why would a Gentile writing to Gentiles perhaps ten years after the destruction of the temple and using Mark or Matthew as a source make the temple into a structuring element of his narrative?⁽¹¹⁾ Our answer must start with an observation: the temple-theme is not peculiar to Luke. In all four

6. H. Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (New York, 1961), pp. 75f., 199.

7. R. Laurentin, *Jésus au temple*, pp. 90f. Also C. Van der Waal has emphasized the connection between Lk. 2 and Mal. 3, 4 ["The Temple in the Gospel According to Luke", *Neotestamentica* 7 (1973):53f.]

8. R. Laurentin, *Jésus au temple*, pp. 37–76; C. Van der Waal, "The Temple in the Gospel According to Luke", p. 55. According to Conzelmann, Jesus seizes the temple and exercises the office of king of Israel, reigning and teaching in the temple ("History and Theology in the Passion Narratives of the Synoptic Gospels", *Interpretation* 24, 2 (1970):196).

9. R. Laurentin, *Jésus au temple*, p. 100.

10. Gaston made too little of the importance of the seeming new beginning in Lk. 3:1 to the Proto-Luke Hypothesis. B.F. Streeter and V. Taylor were especially careful to show that Lk. 1–2 were not part of Proto-Luke (cf. L. Gaston, *No Stone On Another*, pp. 244ff.; B.F. Streeter, *the Four Gospels* (London, 1924), pp. 201–222; V. Taylor, *Behind the third Gospel* (Oxford, 1926)). Gaston also did not take into full consideration the theological connection that exists between Lk. 1–2 and Lk. 3–24 (cf. H.H. Oliver, "The Lucan Birth Stories and the Purpose of Luke-Acts", *NTS* 10 (1964):202–26, especially pp. 220f.; and W.B. Tatum, "The Epoch of Israel: Luke i–ii and the Theological Plan of Luke-Acts", *NTS* 13 (1967):184–95).

11. See the elaborate theory of Naymond Haskins Keathley, "The Concept of the Temple in Luke-Acts" (Th.D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1971), pp. 164–171.

Gospels Jesus drives the money changers out of the temple.⁽¹²⁾ Likewise, opposition to Jesus is centered at the temple in all of the Gospels.⁽¹³⁾ It is especially noteworthy that the death of Jesus in Mark and Matthew is immediately followed by the notice that the curtain of the temple was torn in two (Mk. 15:38/Mt. 27:51). The direct, immediate result of Jesus' death is the tearing of the temple-curtain.⁽¹⁴⁾ Luke's redaction at this point is extremely interesting, because he transposed the notice of Jesus' death and the tearing of the curtain (Lk. 23:45f.). The direct, immediate result of the tearing of the curtain is that Jesus commits his spirit into the Father's hands, and dies.⁽¹⁵⁾ This fits in very nicely with the "Jesus who comes to take back God's temple" perceived by Conzelmann and Laurentin.⁽¹⁶⁾ The tearing of the curtain marks the end of his work. But Luke on the one hand, and Mark and Matthew on the other, are clearly not different in structure at this point, but only different in emphasis.⁽¹⁷⁾ In Luke, Jesus' life-work concerns the temple, and only after this work is completed does he die. In Mark and Matthew, death itself brings Jesus' work with the temple to completion. Thus, it does seem that the temple-theme actually preceded Luke, and was a structural element of a general Gospel-form.

With this in mind, a second observation is in order: the temple in Luke is associated with the proclamation of Good News. Gaston has been helpful here, in calling attention to Luke's precise distinction between the temple itself (ναός) and the temple mount (ἱερόν).⁽¹⁸⁾ Since it is the latter that is emphasized in the Gospel, Gaston concluded that the author was more interested in the temple as a place of teaching and proclamation than as a place of what he termed, "cultic activity".⁽¹⁹⁾

12. Lk. 19:45f./Mk. 11:15-17/Mt. 21:12f./Jn. 2:14-16. Ernst Lohmeyer has emphasized the theme in all four gospels (*Lord of the Temple*, trans. by Stewart Todd (London, 1961), p. 36). He pointed out that the cleansing of the temple should be understood as a sign that the Kingdom is at hand. It is an eschatological event (pp. 44ff.).

13. Lk. 22:47ff./Mk. 14:43ff./Mt. 26:47ff./Jn. 18:2ff. Cf. A.M. Ramsey, "The Narratives of the Passion", *Studia Evangelica* 2, p. 125.

14. Bultmann called the tearing of the temple curtain "a pure novelistic motif", and thought of it as a sign which was added on to the original account of the crucifixion (*The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 2nd ed., trans. J. Marsh (Oxford, 1968), p. 282). But this view undervalues the importance of the temple motif to the Gospel story, and completely disregards the one to one correspondence of the death of Jesus with the tearing of the curtain.

15. A. Loisy noticed the Lucan change, and drew attention to the importance that the torn veil plays in the theology of Hebrews (cf. Heb. 6:19f., 10:19f.), but he nevertheless was hesitant to point to the same emphasis in Luke (*L'evangile selon Luc* (Paris, 1924), p. 561). F.W. Beare, however, saw the "mythical (rather than legendary)" quality of the torn veil (*The Earliest Records of Jesus* (Nashville, 1962), p. 238).

16. Conzelmann did not mention Lk. 23:45f. Laurentin, however, did draw out the significance of the passage, tying it nicely to Jesus' statement in Lk. 2:49 (Jésus au temple, p. 133). Cf. E. Lohmeyer, *Lord of the Temple*, pp. 34f.

17. Cf. F.W. Beare, *The Earliest Records of Jesus*, pp. 238-40.

18. L. Gaston, *No Stone On Another*, pp. 365-69.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 367.

But one must moderate Gaston's definition of cultic activity. The temple mount, the ἱερόν of Luke, was the object of the pilgrimage at the ancient festivals, and proclamation and worship were not mutually exclusive, but tightly bound together in a festival setting. One of the governing ideas of the festival in ancient Israel was the idea that God was revealing himself.⁽²⁰⁾ In a sense, the purpose of the festival was the epiphany of God. In the recitations, processions, songs, dances, mock battles, etc., God made himself known for who he really was. This was especially true in the repetition of the festal myth, which allowed the pilgrim to relive the story of salvation, and so experience first hand God's saving works and will. Thus, the proclamation of the myth at the festival carried associations of "glad tidings".⁽²¹⁾

This coincides with what one finds in Luke, with the appearance of God in the form of Jesus at the temple. K. Baltzer has very ably shown that Luke's use of the temple is governed by this concept of the mighty presence of the Lord, which among other thoughts included at the time of Jesus, the expectation that God would someday cleanse his temple and take up residence there, bringing in the time of salvation.⁽²²⁾ It is the fulfillment of this expectation that is forcefully portrayed by the structure of Luke. The baby Jesus is recognized in the temple as God's Salvation. It is in the temple that the boy Jesus previews his mission concerning the temple. As a man, Jesus enters the temple and drives out the merchants. Then, he teaches and proclaims the good news in the temple. Immediately before his death, the curtain of the temple tears. And, after Jesus' ascension, the disciples go to the temple, where they remain continually blessing God.

It is striking that the temple in Luke is not replaced by the Church. The temple itself appears as something positive.⁽²³⁾ Its possession by the disciples at the end of the Gospel is an affirmation of the dawning, long awaited kingdom. In the eyes of the author, the temple in Jerusalem was the most significant institution on earth. It was the place where the expectations from of old were fulfilled.

To recapitulate, then: The good news of the Gospel is closely allied with the temple theme in Luke. The Lord manifests himself for who he is in relation to the temple. Further, the theme of the temple brings together two

20. Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, vol. 1, trans. D.R. AP-Thomas (New York, 1967), especially pp. 140-69.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 142.

22. K. Baltzer, "The Meaning of the Temple in the Lucan Writings", *HTR* 58 (1965):263-277.

23. The contrast with John seems very sharp at this point. By moving the episode of the cleansing of the temple to the beginning of Jesus' ministry John replaces the temple with the community of the disciples. Thus, there is a much sharper division in John than in the other gospels between the Church and Judaism.

elements of the festival experience. One is the epiphany of the Lord in the temple, and the other is the fulfillment of the expectation that God would purify His temple.

But how is one to understand this close association of festival motifs with a gospel written to gentiles after the destruction of the temple? Of course, one of the governing insights of Biblical scholarship has been that the Bible narratives reflect the worship of the community. For instance, there is no real challenge today to the claim that the cult has influenced the Passover narrative⁽²⁴⁾ — so much so that it is widely accepted that Ex. 12 owes its form as much to the Passover ceremony as to an original Passover event.⁽²⁵⁾ Along similar lines, Rudolf Bultmann has argued that “the Last Supper” was not originally the report of a Passover meal, but arose as a cult legend.⁽²⁶⁾ Is, then, the temple-theme in Luke likewise a projection from the festival setting back into the narrative? Can one hypothesize that the historical development of the third gospel paralleled at this point the development of the Old Testament’s “P” source, which also focuses on the temple and shows the projection of the cult into the narrative, but which was only written down after the destruction of the first temple?

The question of the Gospel-genre is both important and difficult. Among the more recent suggestions are Koester, Perrin, and Kee’s views stressing the kinship to apocalyptic, and Talbert’s view that the form of the gospels is related to biography.⁽²⁷⁾ Although the stronger tendency today is perhaps to think of the gospels as more like sermons than like biographies, one must admit that there is no real consensus among scholars concerning the question of genre. Nevertheless, an observation made by William Beardslee seems significant. He observed that the narrative form of the Gospels conforms to a pattern of religious speech associated with the

24. See Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (Philadelphia, 1974), pp. 178–214; J.B. Segal, *The Hebrew Passover* (London, 1940), p. 150.

25. In this regard, J. Pedersen’s work was especially important [*Israel: Its Life and Culture*, vol. 3–4, 2nd. ed. (London, 1940), pp. 728–37].

26. Bultmann’s main evidence is twofold: 1) There is tension in the introduction of Mk. 14:22–25 into the narrative, which indicates that the author of Mark appropriated these verses ready-prepared from the liturgy of the early Church; and 2) the principal element of the Passover meal — the Passover lamb — is not mentioned in any of the accounts of the meal (*History of the Synoptic Tradition*, pp. 265f.; 277f.). Although J. Jeremias has counter claimed that the historical evidence really indicates that the Last Supper was a Passover meal, and that the Passover lamb was not included in the Gospel-story because it was immaterial to it, the main point remains unchallenged: the cult has shaped the narrative [J. Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (London, 1966). For a complete discussion see I.H. Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper* (Grand Rapids, 1980), pp. 57–75].

27. Helmut Koester and James M. Robinson, *Trajectories Through Early Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1971); Norman Perrin, *The New Testament, an Introduction* (New York, 1974); Howard Clark Kee, *Community of the New Age: Studies in Mark’s Gospel* (Philadelphia, 1977); Charles H. Talbert, *What is a Gospel?: The Genre of the Canonical Gospels* (Philadelphia, 1977).

religious festival.⁽²⁸⁾ As is well known, traditional societies have often used narratives to re-enact the community's founding reality into the present. This reenactment has taken place on special occasions, set aside for this purpose, and has been carried on by specially designated people who recited the founding story. When told in its ritual setting the story functioned to represent the past, so allowing the community to participate in the salvific event.⁽²⁹⁾

Since there are indications that the temple-theme preceded Luke, and was a structural element of a general Gospel form, and since the general Gospel pattern observed by Professor Beardslee, and the temple-theme in Luke are both closely associated with the festival occasion, it is possible to hypothesize that the positive emphasis placed on the temple in Luke results from the author's attempt to recapture an earlier element of the Gospel story. It would have been natural for the Christian community to have early on replaced the Moses-story that was told at Passover with the new story of salvation, also linked to Passover. The temple-theme in Luke might have been appropriated from that story.

One must be cautious at this point, for Luke in many ways is more literary and stands further away from the festival reenactment narrative than do the other gospels.⁽³⁰⁾ However, beyond the temple-theme, there are some other elements peculiar to Luke, which lend support to the idea that the author, while using Mark as a source, and expanding and making more literary his story, also tried to recapture some characteristics of an earlier form. Although this is not the place to discuss these elements, the "Septuagintal or worship language" of Luke, and the hymnic form of the opening chapters of Luke are suggestive in this regard.⁽³¹⁾ Further, the prologue of the gospel, and especially the phrase ἄνατάρξαθαί δειήγησιν (Lk. 1:1), gives some support to this view. Two points in particular should be kept in mind concerning ἄνατάρξαθαί δειήγησιν. The first is that the term δειήγησιν does not easily cover the miracle stories, the sayings of Jesus, and those many other loose bits and pieces of tradition that form-critics would like to see at this point behind Luke's

28. William A. Beardslee, *Literary Criticism of the New Testament* (Philadelphia, 1970), pp. 15f.

29. Cf. Theodor H. Gaster, *Thespis* (New York, 1961); Mircea Eliade, *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, Trans. P. Mairet (New York, 1960); *The Quest* (Chicago, 1969), pp. 72-87; *Cosmos and History*, trans. W.R. Trask (New York, 1959).

30. On the literary style of Luke see Henry J. Cadbury, *The Making of Luke-Acts* (New York, 1927); *The Style and Literary Method of Luke* (Cambridge, 1920).

31. Fred Horton attempted to link the language of Luke to worship with his article entitled "Reflection on the Semitisms of Luke-Acts" in *Perspective on Luke-Acts*, ed. C. Talbert (Edinburgh, 1977). Perhaps, however, the view that the Semitisms in Luke result from the author's attempt to imitate the Septuagint is a more established position (cf. H.F.D. Sparks, "The Semitisms of St. Luke's Gospel," *JTS*44(1943):129-38.

Gospel.⁽³²⁾ Moreover, the number of διήγησις is singular, and one must stretch the syntax of the Lk. 1:1–4 considerably to read the object in close association with the plural subject as indicating the “many (or few) narratives (or sources)” used by the author in composing his own work. The force of the language is that there was only one διήγησις of the things which had been accomplished. The second point that should be kept in mind is that the prepositional force of ἀνατάσσομαι emphasizes the “reproduction” of tradition, rather than the “composition” of tradition. There is no weighty evidence indicating that ἀνατάσσομαι was synonymous with the συντάσσομαι of written compositions.⁽³³⁾ Thus, the easiest reading of the prologue is that the author of Luke, like the πολλοί to which he refers, thought of himself as attempting to pass down the same story delivered from the beginning by the “eyewitnesses and ministers of the word.” Under those circumstances, a combination of literary and reenactment elements becomes entirely possible in the gospel.

Therefore, even if the third gospel was written to Gentiles long after the destruction of the temple, the temple-theme in Luke might well have had its origin in the festival experience. But if it in fact represents a projection of the festival onto the narrative, it also represents much more. Luke’s emphasis on the temple signifies the author’s attempt to preserve an important part of the Jesus-story that was being dropped from the tradition. Luke has often been called a historian, and here the description would fit, not in the sense of one who objectively weighed sources and reconstructed the real events of the life of Jesus, but in the sense of one who recaptured and passed on an old component of the “good news” announced by the earliest Church.

32. Cf. Friedrich Buchsel, “διήγησις”, *TDNT*, II, p. 909.

33. ἀνατάσσομαι is a rare word in ancient Greek texts. Friedrich Blass drew up the evidence very clearly in *Philology of the Gospels*, and attempted to show that the word denoted a “reconstruction or restoration from memory” (London, 1898; reprint ed. Chicago, 1969, pp. 15f.). What is most certain from the evidence, however, is that the force of ἀνατάσσομαι lies in the repetition of something already established.