

CONFERENCE PROCEEDING

Mark 11:16: A Status Quaestionis

Brian C. Dennert, Loyola University Chicago

Presented at the John Cardinal Cody Colloquium, March 16, 2010

The account of Jesus' demonstration in the temple (traditionally labeled, "The Cleansing of the Temple")¹ in Mark 11:15-19 raises a host of questions. How does this account relate to the Johannine episode (Jn 2:13-22)? Does it describe an action of the historical Jesus or is it a creation of the community? If historical, does Mark preserve the intention of the historical Jesus or reinterpret the event's significance? What does the incident teach concerning the attitude of Jesus (and/or the early followers of Jesus) towards the temple? Why does Mark "sandwich" this event between the cursing and the withering of the fig tree in his "three-day scheme" of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem?² In the midst of these questions, Mark 11:16 ("and he would not permit anyone to carry a vessel [σκεῦος] through the temple"), a verse unique to his gospel and almost universally recognized as enigmatic, receives minimal attention.

In part due to their preference for Matthew over Mark,³ early commentators tended to overlook this verse in their discussions of the temple demonstration, focusing their comments on harmonization with the other gospel accounts of the incident, moralistic applications to the life of the church, or the polemic value of the incident.⁴ For example, Origen quotes the verse in

¹ As discussed below, this traditional title presumes a certain interpretation of the event; thus, this paper will refer to the event as the "Demonstration" rather than "Cleansing."

² On day one, Jesus enters into Jerusalem and looks around the temple before departing (Mk 11:1-11). On day two, Jesus curses the fig tree in the morning and then performs this demonstration in the temple (Mk 11:12-19). On day three, the disciples notice the cursed fig tree has withered, and Jesus teaches on faith and prayer (Mk 11:20-26).

³ Reasons for the preference of Matthew over Mark include the belief of apostolic authorship for Matthew but not Mark, the fact that most of Mark is contained in Matthew, the more logical arrangement of Matthew that seemed to make it easier to use in practice, the "greater intelligibility and consistency" of the presentation of Jesus in Matthew as opposed to the "mystery and enigma" of Christ in Mark, and, eventually, Augustine's comments that Mark abbreviated Matthew (R. H. Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of St. Mark* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950], 2-6). The first commentary on Mark appears to be by Victor of Antioch in the fifth century, who lamented the fact that no one had made a commentary on Mark before him; see Sean P. Kealy, *Mark's Gospel: A History of Its Interpretation* (New York: Paulist, 1982), 7-30 for the interpretation of Mark in the first five centuries. This causes discussion of Mark in the Fathers to be a daunting task, requiring inquiry into commentaries and homilies on Matthew as well (particularly in Origen, Augustine, and Chrysostom), as noted in Thomas Oden and Christopher Hall, *Mark* (rev. ed.; ACCS NT 2; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2005), xxxii-v.

⁴ My online search of the *Biblia Patristica* (<http://www.bibliindex.mom.fr/>; 4 March 2010) yielded only two references from the unverified archives of *Biblia Patristica* (John Chrysostom, *Anna*, 3; and Jerome, *Tract. Marc.* 9), with no references to v. 16 in Oden and Hall, *Mark*, 153. Examination of the reference in Chrysostom, *Anna*, actually shows no comment on Mark 11:16; in his discussion of the incident elsewhere, he argues that Jesus twice cleansed the temple (*Hom. Jo.* 23 [NPNF¹ 80-81]; *Hom. Matt.* 67 [409]) and uses it to show the Jews rejecting God and rejecting Jesus even when he comes to them, leading to God's rejection of them now (*Adv. Jud.* 6.7.5-6 [FC 68:174]; *Jud. gent.* 4.3 [FC 73:203]), a line of interpretation also found in other Fathers (e.g. Justin, *Dial.* 17 [ANF 1:203]). For Jerome's comments, see note 6. Origen's quotation of it (see note 5), along with its likely appearance in the Diatessaron (32.5-6, following Mark 11:17 [ANF 9:92]) shows awareness of the verse in the early church. Augustine seemed more concern with harmonizing the Markan account with the Matthean and Johannine accounts than explaining Mark 11:16 in *Harmony of the Gospels*, 2.67-68 (NPNF¹ 6:159-161); he gives an allegorical application of the Johannine account

discussing the differences between the gospel accounts but does not comment on it.⁵ Jerome makes a moralistic application, noting that Jesus prohibited all vessels from being carried while the church in his day tolerated the presence of impure vessels (*vasa*).⁶

The lack of focused attention on this verse continued through the Middle Ages and the Reformation⁷ Pseudo-Jerome makes no comment,⁸ and Bede sees Jesus' actions in forbidding the carrying of vessels used for the purchase of merchandise as a symbol for the casting out the wicked and refusal to let them enter again.⁹ Among the Reformers, Calvin remarks that Jesus shows zeal for the temple in not tolerating anything "inconsistent with religious services."¹⁰

In contemporary discussions, a fixation on the question of historicity of the temple incident often overrules careful examination of this verse¹¹ because its presentation of Jesus bringing to a halt all activity in the massive temple area seems historically problematic.¹² Even attempts at

in *Tract. Ev. Jo.* 10 (FC 78:216-217). In another use of the Markan account of the temple incident, Ambrose notes that the quote from Isaiah shows a desire by God for the Gentile nations in *Spir.* 2.10.101 (NPNF² 10:127).

⁵ Origen quotes Mark 11:16 in *Comm. Jo.* 10.15 (ANF 9:392) to show the discrepancy in all four accounts of the incident but does not make any sort of allegorical comment on it, focusing his attention more on allegorical meaning in John and Matthew in his exposition (*Comm. Jo.* 10.15-18 [ANF 9:392-399]) and discussing the allegorical sense of Luke's focus only on the sellers in *Hom. Luc.* 38 (FC 94:157-158).

⁶ Jerome, *Tract. Marc.* 9 (FC 57:182). Also see his similar use of the incident in *Epist.* 125.20 [NPNF² 6:251-252] and *Comm. Matt.* 16.20 [FC 117:235-23]).

⁷ The four commentaries on Mark produced between 650-1000 CE (Kealy, *Mark's Gospel*, 31) do not appear to advance the discussion on v. 16 (see notes 8 and 9), with the only comment on the phrase in Aquinas' *Catena Aurea* by Bede (see note 9). Commentators between 1000-1500 CE continued the trend of limited discussion on Mark, often relying on insights by Chrysostom and making pastoral applications while skipping over portions of Mark discussed in Matthew (Kealy, *Mark's Gospel*, 39-43). Moving to the Reformation, Martin Luther's discussion highlights the violent aspect of this act of Christ that was in line with the Mosaic Law but would not be proper for today; Jesus showed zeal for the temple but does not give an example for Christians (*Luther's Works*, [ed. Jaroslav Pelikan; 55 vols.; St. Louis: Concordia, 1957], 22:221-228).

⁸ See Michael Cahill, *The First Commentary on Mark: An Annotated Translation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 86, which is his English translation of *Exposition Evangelii secundum Marcum* [CCSL 82; Turnhout: Brepols, 1997]).

⁹ See Thomas Aquinas, ed. *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected out of the Fathers by St. Thomas Aquinas* (trans. John Henry Newman; 4 vols.; Oxford: James Parker, 1874; repr. London: St. Austin Press, 1997), 2:228. This comment furthers the moralizing trajectory.

¹⁰ John Calvin, *Commentary on Harmony of the Gospels* (trans. William Pringle; 3 vols.; Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society; repr. vol. 17 of *Calvin's Commentaries*; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 14. Calvin comments on the incident harmonize the gospel accounts (pp. 7-15), but he does make a specific comment on v. 16 on p. 14.

¹¹ The view proposed in E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 61-70, that this event was a key incident leading to the death of Jesus has loomed large in discussion of the historical Jesus. For recent (and differing) reevaluations of this contribution of Sanders, see Paula Fredriksen, "Gospel Chronologies, the Scene in the Temple, and the Crucifixion of Jesus" and Stephen Hultgren, "The Incident in the Temple as the Occasion for Jesus' Death: Meeting Some Objections," in *Redefining First-Century Jewish and Christian Identities: Essays in Honor of Ed Parish Sanders* (ed. Fabian E. Udoh; Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 2008), 246-282, 283-296. For defenses of the historicity of this event differing from Sanders' proposal, see Richard Bauckham, "Jesus' Demonstration in the Temple," *Law and Religion: Essays on the Place of the Law in Israel and Early Christianity* (ed. Barnabas Lindars; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 72-89; Craig A. Evans, "Jesus' Action in the Temple: Cleansing or Portent of Destruction?" *CBQ* 51 (1989): 237-270; and P. M. Casey, "Culture and Historicity: The Cleansing of the Temple," *CBQ* 59 (1997): 306-332. For objections to the historicity of this event, see George W. Buchanan, "Symbolic Money-Changers in the Temple?" *NTS* 37 (1991): 280-290; David R. J. Miller, "The (A)historicity of Jesus' Temple Demonstration: A Test Case in Methodology," *SBL 1991 Seminar Papers* (SBLASP 30; ed. D. J. Lull; Atlanta: Scholars, 1991), 235-252; and David Seeley, "Jesus' Temple Act," *CBQ* 55 (1993): 263-283.

¹² Those who see the event as based on a historical occurrence (see list in note 11) often argue that the demonstration was minor, not a complete seizure of the temple. However, not all see the Markan description as historically unlikely. In an attempt to reconcile the Markan and Johannine accounts, Lightfoot concludes that the Markan placement of the account at the end of Jesus' life seems correct but the Johannine account illuminates details

understanding Mark on a literary level have difficulty grasping the meaning of this puzzling verse,¹³ with most contemporary explanations of this verse occurring within discussions of the meaning of the temple demonstration in light of the Jewish context of Jesus' ministry and the Markan context of the incident. Three primary proposals have emerged regarding the meaning of Jesus' demonstration in the temple and, thus, the meaning of this comment: purification of the temple, messianic action, and proclamation of destruction coming to the temple.¹⁴

Purification of the Temple

The traditional understanding of this event is that of Jesus purifying or cleansing the temple from misuse, as he exhibits zeal for the temple by bringing purity. This view is still widespread, with various explanations on the exact nature of Jesus' protest. Many argue that Jesus seeks to stop the commercial activities that have overrun the temple, as the temple should be a place of prayer and not a place of commerce.¹⁵ While the location of the protest in the Court of Gentiles is not explicit, some have argued from this inferred location and the quotation of Is 56:7 in Mark 11:17 that this commercialization obstructed its intended use as a place for the Gentiles to pray; therefore, Jesus shows concern for Gentiles to have access to God.¹⁶ Other proposed reasons for the protest include the suggestions that Jesus opposed practices recently introduced by Caiaphas,¹⁷ the expansions to the temple done by Herod,¹⁸ or commerce that hindered the ability of the poor to present sacrifices while giving the merchants a profit so large that they needed containers to carry it.¹⁹ The most common explanation of this view is that Jesus' prohibition of carrying a vessel through the temple in verse 16 (διενέγκη σκευος διὰ τοῦ ἱεροῦ) enforces laws against using the temple as a "thoroughfare" (*m. Ber.* 9:5; *b. Ber.* 54a; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.106); thus, Jesus opposed the profanation of the sacred place.²⁰ In addition to implementing these

and meaning, with the result that "the statement in Mark that the Lord allowed no one to carry a vessel through the temple [11:16] may imply that His supporters seized and guarded the entrances and exits of the temple" (*Gospel Message of St. Mark*, 78).

¹³ In his reader response commentary, Bas M. F. van Iersel notes "Jesus' last action [11:16] is mentioned without further elaboration and is an anticlimax for the reader" (*Mark: A Reader Response Commentary* [trans. W. H. Bisscheroux; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998], 357). Seeley, who argues against the historicity of the event, fails to discuss 11:16 in his "Jesus' Temple Act," as noted in Casey, "Culture and Historicity," 306-307. Many contemporary commentators seem dependent on the reference to *m. Ber.* 9:5 given in Str-B, 2.27; see the discussion of the "Purification of the Temple" view in this paper and note 20.

¹⁴ These views are by no means exclusive, as the examination will show; see note 52.

¹⁵ E.g. N. Q. Hamilton, "Temple Cleansing and Temple Bank," *JBL* 83 (1964): 365-372; Bauckham, "Jesus' Demonstration," 72-89; and Hans Dieter Betz, "Jesus and the Purity of the Temple (Mark 11:15-18)," *JBL* 116 (1997): 455-472.

¹⁶ E.g. William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 406; D. E. Nineham, *Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 406; and Casey, "Culture and Historicity," 312, paralleling the comments of Lightfoot, *Gospel Message*, 62-64. See rebuttal on this emphasis in R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary Based on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 445, n. 60 or Sanders, *Jesus*, 68-69, who notes that the place of the incident is "not determinative but coincidental."

¹⁷ V. Eppstein, "The Historicity of the Cleansing of the Temple," *ZNW* 69 (1978): 42-58. For critique, see Evans, "Destruction," 268-269.

¹⁸ Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark* (Hermeneia 55; Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 527-530.

¹⁹ See Casey, "Culture and Historicity," 310-311, 313-314. For a response to Casey's view, see David Seeley, "Jesus' Temple Act Revisited: A Response to P. M. Casey," *CBQ* 62 (2000), 56.

²⁰ See C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark: An Introduction and a Commentary* (rev. ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 358; Nineham, *Mark*, 300-304; Morna D. Hooker, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark* (BNTC; London: A & C Black, 1991), 268; Douglas R. A. Hare, *Mark* (Westminster Bible Companion; Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996), 142-143; Daniel Harrington and John Donahue, *The Gospel of Mark* (SP 2; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 2002), 328, 332; and Casey, "Culture and Historicity," 309. This understanding is likely what Buchanan means by saying that 11:16 "is an isolated halachic recollection, different from

rules, some see Jesus extending the realm of these regulations from the temple into the Court of the Gentiles.²¹ In this view, the term *σκεῦος* could refer to moneybags²² or receptacles for carrying supplies like wine, flour, and oil used in sacrifices and sold at a profit by the current temple leadership.²³

The most common objection to this view is that the commercial activities occurring in the temple were necessary for the sacrificial cult to function and the payment of the temple tax;²⁴ impeding the commercial activity would therefore hinder the offering of prescribed sacrifices and the purpose of temple worship. Furthermore, upon closer examination, the rabbis and Josephus do not offer proper parallels, as the rabbis forbid entering and do not mention a vessel, and Josephus speaks about the temple (*ναός*), not the Court of the Gentiles (*ἱερόν* in Mark 11:16).²⁵ Finally, the proposed meanings for *skeu'o*" within this view remain questionable.²⁶

Messianic Action

Some scholars who view the demonstration as a cleansing further state that this behavior is an act of the Messiah.²⁷ Perhaps Cecil Roth has most adeptly argued this point, drawing upon Zechariah 14:21: "every cooking pot in Jerusalem and in Judah will be holy to the Lord of hosts so that all who sacrifice may come and use them to boil the flesh of the sacrifice. And there shall no longer be traders²⁸ in the house of the LORD of hosts on that day."²⁹ Thus, Jesus makes all vessels cultic vessels with his action, with the result that people could not take the vessels out of the temple. Furthermore, Jesus' action corrects the misapplication of this text that prevented Gentiles from being present in the temple area by showing that "merchants" not "Canaanites" is the proper interpretation of this verse. Texts such as Hos 9:15, Mal 3:1, and *PssSol* 17-18 indicate an expectation that the Messiah will bring cleansing to Jerusalem in preparation for the kingdom of God.³⁰

However, although Matthew references Zec 9:9 in his account, Mark has no explicit remark

the ordinary gospel material, and probably added later" ("Symbolic Money-Changers," 281). This also appears to be the view of Eduard Schweizer, as he comments that v. 16 tones down Jesus' protest to show it only as reformation of the temple management, with the original protest a stronger word of warning (*The Good News According to Mark* [trans. Donald H. Madvig; Atlanta John Knox, 1970], 231-233).

²¹ Casey, "Culture and Historicity," 310; Robert H. Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 643; and Collins, *Mark*, 530. Or, as Lightfoot notes, the disregard for the Court of the Gentiles renders unclean the whole building (*Gospel Message of Mark*, 63).

²² J. Massyngberd Ford, "Money 'bags' in the Temple (Mk 11, 16)," *Bib* 57 (1976): 249-253.

²³ Bauckham, "Jesus' Demonstration," 78.

²⁴ See Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 62-65; and Jacob Neusner, "Money-Changers in the Temple: The Mishnah's Explanation," *NTS* 35 (1989): 287-290.

²⁵ E.g. James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (PNTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 342.

²⁶ E.g. Gundry, *Mark*, 642; and France, *Gospel of Mark*, 445 n. 48.

²⁷ This idea receives mention in Lightfoot, *Gospel Message*, 67-68, but without the references given below. A brief discussion of this possibility also occurs in Hamilton, "Temple Cleansing," 372.

²⁸ Or "Canaanites," as noted in NRSV.

²⁹ Cecil Roth, "The Cleansing of the Temple and Zechariah xiv 21," *NovT* 4 (1960): 174-181. This view also appears in David Catchpole, "The Triumphal Entry," in *Jesus and the Politics of His Day* (ed. E. Bammel and C. F. D. Moule; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 319-334.

³⁰ E.g. Richard Hiers, "Purification of the Temple: Preparation for the Kingdom of God," *JBL* 90 (1971): 82-90; Nineham, *Mark*, 300; and Lane, *Gospel*, 406. For these and other references in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple texts, see Evans, "Destruction," 248-256. Buchanan adopts a similar position in arguing for the symbolic nature of the event in "Symbolic Money-Changers."

connecting the incident to this text or any other suggested above. In addition, the description and the entry of Jesus in the temple on the previous day in Mark 11:11 contradicts Mal 3:1, which speaks of a sudden entry into the temple ("See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple" [NRSV]).³¹ The parallel with Zec 14:21 also seems imprecise, as the text does not show Jesus commandeering common vessels for sacred use because he prohibits carrying them "through" not "out" of the temple.³² In addition, these texts often speak of a protest against the priesthood, while Mark explicitly presents Jesus as confronting the moneychangers, not the priests.³³

Sign of Destruction

The significance of the buying and selling activity for the sacrificial system and payment of the temple tax has led some to view this action less as a cleansing and more as an omen or sign of the temple's destruction. According to influential work of E. P. Sanders, the historical Jesus indicated the replacement of the temple with a new one through his symbolic action, which was a minor demonstration in the temple. Therefore, this protest was not against the current practices in the temple.³⁴ The idea of cleansing conveyed in verse 16 is a later interpretation of the church.³⁵ However, one wonders why Mark would include a later addition if the incident symbolized the destruction and replacement of the temple, an issue Mark elsewhere shows interest (13:1-2).³⁶ William Telford has argued that Mark does in fact present this action as a sign of the destruction of the temple, as the withering of the fig tree interprets this event and points to the destruction of the temple, a view supported by numerous other scholars.³⁷ In this interpretation, the *σκεῦος* of Mark 11:16 is a liturgical vessel, the meaning of the word in approximately one-third of its appearances in the LXX.³⁸ Thus, prohibiting the trade in the temple impedes the offering of sacrifices,³⁹ with the cessation of activity in the temple pointing to the coming end of activity in the temple, including sacrifices.⁴⁰ The quotation of Jeremiah would confirm this idea of the imminent end to the temple and termination of sacrifices, and the

³¹ William M. Watty, "Jesus and the Temple—Cleansing or Cursing?" *ExpTim* 93 (1981-1982), 236.

³² Gundry, *Mark*, 643. Seeley further notes that the dispute concerning the meaning of Zech 14:21 during Jesus' time renders it unlikely that Jesus' actions would be based on it ("Jesus' Temple Act," 268).

³³ Seeley, "Jesus' Temple Act," 266-267, though Bauckham, "Jesus' Demonstration," 75, suggests that the priests or Levites acted as moneychangers.

³⁴ Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, 61-90, esp. 75.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 364 n. 1, where he notes that this description would not fit the Jerusalem temple. Also see Schweizer, *Good News*, 233.

³⁶ This would be particularly true if the gospel dates after the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. Cf. Evans, "Destruction," 237-243, 247-248, who uses this as an argumentation for its historicity and Collins, *Mark*, 527, who notes that v. 16 is likely a pre-Markan tradition that may trace back to the historical Jesus.

³⁷ William R. Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree* (JSNTSupp 1; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980), 92-92, n. 102. See also Werner H. Kelber, *The Kingdom in Mark: A New Place and a New Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 100-102; William M. Watty, "Jesus and the Temple," 235-239.; Edwards, *Gospel*, 341-345; and Joel Marcus, *Mark: A New Translation and Introduction* (2 vols.; AB 27; New York: Doubleday, 2000-2009), 2:790-793.

³⁸ See C. Maurer, "σκεῦος," *TDNT*, 7:359, and noted in Kelber, *Kingdom*, 100 and Telford, *Barren Temple*, 92-93, with Josephus, *Ant.* 18.85; and *J. W.* 1.39 as other examples. While noting that context is determinative for the meaning of *σκεῦος*, Collins, *Mark*, 530 see the temple context as pointing to these vessels as liturgical. See note 49 for more discussion.

³⁹ Bruce D. Chilton, *The Temple of Jesus: His Sacrificial Program within a Cultural History of Sacrifice* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University, 1992), 111-115; and Edwards, *Gospel*, 342-343.

⁴⁰ E.g. Herman C. Waetjen, *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 182; and Bradley Chance, "The Cursing of the Temple and the Tearing of the Veil in the Gospel of Mark," *BibInt* 15 (2007): 271.

quotation from Isaiah shows that prayer, not sacrifice, is now proper.⁴¹ Jostein Ådna advances the argument of this position, noting that Mark presents Jesus as ending the sacrificial system through his atoning death,⁴² with Jacob Neusner holding that Jesus replaces the daily whole-offering with the rite of the Eucharist.⁴³ This sharp polemic against the temple may have led Matthew and Luke to omit this verse.⁴⁴

This third view has its share of difficulties. A common argument notes that impeding the commercial trade is a strange way to object to the sacrificial cult; Jesus could have made his protest clearer through a more direct attack on the cult rather than this obscure way often lost on interpreters.⁴⁵ In addition, Neusner notes that "no Jew of the time [could] have understood the meaning of the action of Jesus," as the action only makes sense in light of the establishment of the Eucharist,⁴⁶ raising the question of whether Jesus would perform an action that observers not only could not comprehend but would misinterpret as a complete rejection of the Torah.⁴⁷ While this objection is more problematic for the historical Jesus than the Markan Jesus (cf. Mark 7:1-23, esp. 19c), one wonders if Mark's readers, who often need Jewish customs explained, would detect that this protest is against the sacrificial cult if Mark makes no comment on the connection of the commercial practices to the sacrificial system.⁴⁸ Further, it is surprising that the Markan Jesus does not make a more explicit comment or prediction on the destruction of the temple if this event signaled the end of sacrifice and the destruction of the temple; it seems too subtle in light of the fact that Mark later explicitly mentions the temple's destruction (13:1-2).⁴⁹ Since Mark uses *σκεῦος* in a non-liturgical sense in 3:27, and the word appears in a non-liturgical sense in the majority (two-thirds) of its occurrences in the LXX, it is not a technical term. The context does not necessitate that it refers to liturgical vessels, nor is there a modifier designating it as liturgical as in Hb 9:21 (τὰ σκεύη τῆς λειτουργίας).⁵⁰ Finally, the use of Is 56:7

⁴¹ Jostein Ådna, "Jesus' Symbolic Act in the Temple (Mark 11:15-17) :The Replacement of the Sacrificial Cult by his Atoning Death," *Gemeinde ohne Tempel = Community without temple: zur Substituierung und Transformation des Jerusalemer Tempels und seines Kults im Alten Testament, antiken Judentum und frühen Christentum* (ed. Beate Ego, et al; Tübingen: Mohr, 1999), 469-470.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 471-473

⁴³ Neusner, "Money-Changers," 287-290. He notes that the disciples would comprehend this replacement only after his death, as the temple incident prepared them to understand this replacement.

⁴⁴ Telford, *Barren Temple*, 82.

⁴⁵ Hamilton, "Temple Cleansing," 372; Gundry, *Mark*, 643, 675; Hare, *Mark*, 142-143, as well as the comments in Evans, "Destruction," 247-248. Pace Telford, who argues that there "was no more effective means of stopping the flow of sacrifices than by seizing the vessels in which gifts and offerings were received and carried by the priests (on behalf of the worshippers) through the various Temple courts to the altar" (*Barren Temple*, 93).

⁴⁶ Neusner, "Money-Changers," 290. According to Neusner, Jesus and his disciples would be the sole ones to understand his actions, as only they had the context of the Last Supper to comprehend the replacement of the daily whole offering with the Eucharist (see *ibid.*, 289-290). Neusner's proposal recalls a comment made by Lightfoot, who notes that Mark "wishes his readers to draw the same lesson from the cleansing as from the Lord's words at the Last Supper. On each occasion the Lord ... is concerned with one aspect of the arrival of the messianic ... namely the universalization of the Jewish worship of God" (*Gospel Message*, 66-67).

⁴⁷ As Neusner remarks, "[O]nly someone who rejected the Torah's explicit teaching concerning the daily whole offering could have overturned the tables" ("Money-Changers," 289).

⁴⁸ Gundry, *Mark*, 675-676.

⁴⁹ As Gundry notes, "Without a pronouncement of judgment, stopping the traffic looks reformatory" (*Mark*, 675). Also see the comments in Evans, "Destruction," 238; and Buchanan, "Symbolic Money-Changers," 248. While the withering of the fig tree could be the "commentary" on the event, one might expect an explicit indication, such as Mark 7:19c on the food laws, particularly if the prophecy had come true.

⁵⁰ While noting the use of *σκεῦος* for liturgical vessels in the LXX, Maurer labels the use of the word in Mark 11:16 as "any vessel that can be carried" ("*σκεῦος*," 7:362). A similar designation of *σκεῦος* as a general word for an object used for any purpose appears in W. L. Lane, "Vessel, Pot, Potter, Mix," *NIDNTT*, 3:913; and BDAG, 927, both of which further comment that an explicit statement or context can show it to be a cultic vessel.

does not point to the replacement of sacrifice with prayer, as prayer often goes with sacrifice.⁵¹ Because of these difficulties with the destructive imagery of the event itself alongside of its placement sandwiched within the withering of the fig tree account, some have proposed that the *primary meaning* of the action was purification, with it *also foretelling* the destruction of the temple through the Markan placement.⁵²

Conclusion

Therefore, commentators frequently have overlooked Mark 11:16 and other concerns have overruled careful attention to this verse, rendering this verse overdue for thorough examination. The explanations of this verse within the three major proposals to the Markan Jesus' demonstration in the temple noted above reveal three key details an explanation of this verse must consider. First, an interpretation must explain why the term *skeu'o*" appears as the object of Jesus' prohibition. Second, one must address the fact that the prohibition regards carrying "through" (διαφέρω; δια), as opposed to entering or exiting, the temple. Third, the location of this prohibition in the temple (ἱερόν) would also appear to be an important aspect in understanding the actions of the Markan Jesus. In addition to these details, the explanation of 11:16 must connect to the wider meaning of Mark's description of Jesus' demonstration, such as the driving out of sellers *and buyers*, the overturning of the tables of the moneychangers and the seats of those who sold doves, the quotations from Isaiah and Jeremiah in verse 17, and the placement of the temple incident sandwiched within the account of the withering of the fig tree.

While this verse might obscure the historicity and meaning of the event in the life of the historical Jesus, deeper consideration of 11:16 may help disclose Mark's intention in reconstructing or creating this event, perhaps at variance with the understanding of Matthew and Luke, the similar account in John, or the historical Jesus—or possibility in continuity with one or all of them! Therefore, this overlooked verse may be a key to understanding the meaning of the incident in Mark's gospel and even the perspective of the historical Jesus towards the temple; further attention to it could yield benefits for those interested in biblical studies, the historical Jesus in his Jewish context, and Jewish-Christian relations.

⁵¹ Bauckham, "Jesus' Demonstration," 83-84.

⁵² See Ben Witherington III, *The Gospel of Mark: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 315-316; and Robert H. Stein, *Mark* (BECNT; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 515. A synthesis of the views also occurs in "harmonization" accounts, as Lightfoot notes that Jesus' actions shows his regards for Jewish actions, while John's account points to it being a "sign" of the coming destruction of the temple and the Lord's death (*Gospel Message*, 69). For an attempt to combine elements of many proposals, see N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 413-428, 490-493, esp. 417-418.