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# Conclusions and Further Implications

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# Chapter 8
# Conclusions and Further Implications

The power of any theory lies in its ability to explain things that are otherwise opaque or unclear. Reading the Sermon on the Mount as a text that was integrally linked to temple vocabulary, temple authority, temple ritual, religious initiation and group identity formation explains many things about the unity, the meaning, the reception, and the durable memory of this seminal text.

Every culture, it would appear, has its coded figures of speech, the meanings of which are perfectly transparent to people within that culture. As seen throughout this book, sufficient evidence has been found to advance the claim that temple materials comprised a strong element in the Sermon on the Mount. This realization sheds essential light on what the Sermon would have originally meant and how it would have been initially heard by people steeped in the words and images of Jewish culture in the first century. Although each point in this rhetorical ensemble is not equally strong, the cumulative effect of the evidence is clear enough. Jesus' words struck one familiar chord after another. Not only would those chords have resonated with the general ethos of pious Jews in that day, they would also have struck at the very heart of the main religious institution of the Jewish world, namely the Temple, which cast a long and influential shadow over all its surrounding landscapes.

Seeing the Sermon on the Mount in a temple setting gives new appreciation to its place in the structure of the gospel of Matthew. W.D. Davies and others have perceptively seen Jesus as a new Moses, and they have made a strong case that this is a leading paradigm in Matthew's gospel, but to this insight can now be added connections in the Sermon on the Mount with Moses's instructions concerning the building of the Tabernacle, the prototype of the Temple. The new Moses was not only a new lawgiver but also a new temple founder.

In the Talmud, as was pointed out above, God was said to pass through ten stages in taking his leave from the Temple.[1] In the gospel of Matthew, the direction of those ten stages is reversed. Instead of moving from the Holy of Holies out into the wilderness as in the Talmud, here God and his people are presented as moving in the opposite direction, entering the Temple. Beginning (10) in the wilderness with John the Baptist (Matthew 3:1), Matthew's account moves with Jesus (9) up onto a place of temptation (Matthew 4:1), (8) to the holy city of Jerusalem (Matthew 4:5), and (7) onto the highest point on the wall of the Temple (Matthew 4:5), and then ascends (6) to a high mountain (cf. the roof of the Temple) which

[1] TB, Rosh Hashanah 31a, discussed in text accompanying note 23 in chapter 3 above.

overlooks the kingdoms of the world (Matthew 4:8); at that point the devil must depart, and angelic beings (cf. true temple personnel) come as ministrants (Matthew 4:11); this allows one to satisfy the entrance requirements (Matthew 5:2–12) and go (5) into the court of the priests (with the Decalogue and altar; Matthew 5:13–47), subsequently (4) into the great hall (with alms, prayer, forgiveness, fasting, washing and anointing; Matthew 5:48–6:24), and ultimately (3) through a narrow gate (Matthew 7:14), to pass (2) the judgment of those guarding the holy place, and to enter (1) into the holy presence (Matthew 6:25–7:23).

This scenario may help to explain Matthew's main message as the coming of God to his people and why the Temple figures so prominently in this gospel. In contrast to the gospel of Mark, in which the Temple first appears after the triumphal entry, the Temple is present in Matthew from the outset.[2] As Daniel Gurtner has recognized, the reference to the altar in Matthew 5:23–24 avers that "'participation in the sacrificial system,' far from being replaced or mooted, is 'presupposed.'"[3] It is true that the parable of the wise man who built his house on the rock may pave the way for Jesus' recognition of Peter's conversion in Matthew 16; but earlier, just as David was appointed to build a house as Yahweh's perpetual dwelling place, and just as God will establish David's throne forever, the gates of hell shall not prevail against anyone who builds his house on the rock of God's temple. Next, Matthew locates Jesus' healing in the Temple, "not violating the Law by acknowledging these outcasts in the Temple, but upholding it. . . . He heals their disabilities 'so that they may then enter.'"[4] So many times, Matthew shows Jesus speaking or acting in the Temple, encouraging payment of the temple tax (Matthew 17:24–27), driving out the money changers (21:12–13), teaching openly (21:23; 26:55), reasoning with Jewish leaders, answering questions, giving parables, and cursing the Pharisees (21:23–23:39), and lamenting the Temple's coming destruction (24:1–2). Matthew, a Levite, apparently felt "no need to attack the Jerusalem Temple, nor did he. Rather did he assume its propriety, that is, its foundation in the Torah, and its one-time sanctity."[5] Matthew is concerned only "to portray the Temple as being misused by those in charge of it."[6] Matthew's positive affinity to the Temple is only strengthened by the many temple elements in the Sermon on the Mount, which more than accounts for Matthew's use of this text near the beginning of his gospel, in which temple themes are thinly veiled. In reemploying temple themes and expressions, and not writing an entirely new song,

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[2] Daniel M. Gurtner, "Matthew's Theology of the Temple and the 'Parting of the Ways,'" in Daniel M. Gurtner and John Nolland (eds), *Built upon the Rock: Studies in the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2007), p. 138.

[3] Gurtner, "Matthew's Theology of the Temple," p. 133.

[4] Gurtner, "Matthew's Theology of the Temple," p. 139.

[5] Gurtner, "Matthew's Theology of the Temple," p. 152, quoting W.D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Matthew* (Edinburgh, 1988), vol. 3, p. 143.

[6] Gurtner, "Matthew's Theology of the Temple," p. 143.

the Sermon on the Mount transposes the meaning of the Temple into another key, as a musician might transpose a famous melody so as to begin with another pitch, or as a composer might write new variations on a familiar tune.[7]

Seeing its temple character also reinforces the view that the Sermon on the Mount should be thought of as a pre-Matthean source,[8] written at an early time when Jesus and his followers were still hoping for a restoration, reform, and rejuvenation of the Temple, not its destruction or obsolescence. In looking for the Temple to be a house of prayer, Jesus affirmed the "legitimacy of its function" and desired "to see that function restored."[9] A previous, solemn ritual use of the Sermon on the Mount among the early disciples would help to explain its respectful presentation by Matthew as a single block of text, strengthening several conclusions advanced by Betz and others that the Sermon on the Mount is in some ways un-Matthean and in most ways pre-Matthean,[10] and in no case inconsistent with the characteristics of the *ipsissima vox* of Jesus.[11] This understanding of the Sermon on the Mount would also explain why "the parting of the ways" between Christians and other varieties of Jews in the first century turned out to be a longer and more complicated process than one might otherwise have expected.[12] A simple rejection of the Temple would have resulted in a much less problematical separation.

If Jesus regularly used the Sermon on the Mount (or something like it) in instructing initiates and guiding them through the stages of induction into the full

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[7] Joshua L. Moss, "Being the Temple: Early Jewish and Christian Interpretive Transpositions," in Lieve M. Teugels and Lumer Rivka (eds), *Midrash and Context* (Piscataway, N.J., 2007), pp. 39–59.

[8] Certain passages in the Sermon on the Mount may well postdate Jesus' lifetime, such as those that reflect anti-Pauline sentiments. However, these may be later additions.

[9] Gurtner, "Matthew's Theology of the Temple," p. 138.

[10] Hans Dieter Betz, *Essays on the Sermon on the Mount*, trans. L. Welborn (Philadelphia, 1985), pp. 1–15, 55–76; and Hans Dieter Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, ed. Adela Yarbro Collins (Minneapolis, 1995), pp. 70–80. Alfred M. Perry, "The Framework of the Sermon on the Mount," *JBL* 54 (1935): 103–15, similarly finds evidence that Matthew worked from a written source that he regarded "so highly that he used it for the foundation of his longer Sermon, even in preference to the Q discourse" (quote on 115). On the conjectured existence of other pre-Matthean sources, see Georg Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Exegetical Commentary*, trans. O.C. Dean Jr (Nashville, 1988), pp. 55–6, 63, 67–8, 72.

[11] Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, trans. J. Bowden (New York, 1971), pp. 29–37; see John Strugnell, "'Amen, I Say unto You' in the Sayings of Jesus and in Early Christian Literature," *HTR* 67/2 (1974): 177–82. The Sermon speaks in parables, proclaims the kingdom, and uses cryptic sayings, amen, and Abba.

[12] Showing that the separation of Christianity from Judaism was a slow and complex process, with the Temple being the key issue that distinguished the various Jewish sects and movements, see Richard Bauckham, "The Parting of the Ways: What Happened and Why," *ST* 47 (1993): 135–51.

ranks of discipleship, this would explain why bits and pieces of this text appear elsewhere in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, as well as in the letters of James and Paul. It is often assumed that Jesus said something once and only once, or that he always said it in the same way. This assumption lies implicitly behind the quest to ascertain the "original form" of the Beatitudes or of the Lord's Prayer. But if Jesus blessed his disciples using the words of the Beatitudes on many occasions, and if he used the text of the Sermon on the Mount ritualistically, two different performances of that text could both be original sayings. Rituals and ceremonies do not need to be reiterated identically each time they are reproduced in order to be authoritative or effective. Moreover, a ritual reading of the Sermon on the Mount would explain its apparent fragmentary composition. Rituals, like all dramas, are performed stage by stage. They also can be easily quoted, section by section or line by line, as discrete elements outside of their overall context.

Thus, for example, the complex relationships between the Sermon on the Mount and Luke's so-called Sermon on the Plain and the other gospels become more understandable. For example, many assume that the sayings of Jesus started out short and simple and that they grew in complexity as they were collected, grouped, and handed down in folklore and tradition until his followers canonized them. Hence, Jeremias reasons: "The Sermon on the Plain [in Luke 6] is very much shorter than that on the mount, and from this we must conclude that in the Lucan Sermon on the Plain we have an earlier form of the Sermon on the Mount."[13] This view receives some support from the fact that pithy sayings of Jesus were collected elsewhere by Matthew into single chapters (as in the Parable Sermon of Matthew 13), and thus one infers that the same thing occurred with the Sermon on the Mount.[14] But this inference is not compelling. What may have happened in the case of Matthew 13 need not have happened for Matthew 5–7. Moreover, movements as dynamic as early Christianity do not characteristically begin with a sputtering start. Great religious and philosophical movements typically begin with the monumental appearance of a figure who enthralls the spirits of his followers and galvanizes them into dedicated action. That result does not flow from disjointed sayings and fragmented maxims. Day in and day out, Jesus spoke to his disciples and to the multitudes who flocked to see him. They came out to hear more than a string of oracular one-liners. The Sermon on the Mount projects that body of coherent wisdom and sweeping perspective. The abbreviated excerpts scattered elsewhere in the synoptic Gospels are its derivatives.

In fact, one would not expect the Sermon on the Mount to be shared in its sacred completeness in an open, popular setting, which is what one finds in Mark and in Luke's Sermon on the Plain. Table 2 shows the location of Sermon on the Mount materials in Mark and Luke.

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[13] Joachim Jeremias, *The Sermon on the Mount*, trans. Norman Perrin (Philadelphia, 1963), p. 15.

[14] Jeremias, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 13.

Table 2: Sermon on the Mount Materials Elsewhere in Matthew, Mark and Luke

| | Matthew | Mark | Luke 6 | Luke 8 | Luke 11 | Luke 12 | Luke 13 | Luke 14 | Luke 16 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Blessed are the poor | | | 6:20 | | | | | | |
| Blessed are the hungry | | | 6:21 | | | | | | |
| Blessed are the reviled | | | 6:22–23 | | | | | | |
| Salt is good, savor | | 9:50 | | | | | | 14:34–35 | |
| Lamp under a bushel | | 4:21 | | 8:16 | | | | | |
| Not one jot | | | | | | | | | 16:17 |
| Settle quickly | | | | | | 12:57–59 | | | |
| Cut off your hand | 18:8–9 | 9:43–48 | | | | | | | |
| Divorce | 19:9 | 10:11–12 | | | | | | | 16:18 |
| Turn the other cheek | | | 6:29–30 | | | | | | |
| Love your enemies | | | 6:27–28, 32–35 | | | | | | |
| Be perfect/merciful | | | 6:36 | | | | | | |
| The Lord's Prayer | | | | | 11:2–4 | | | | |
| Treasure in Heaven | 19:21 | | | | | 12:33–34 | | | |
| Eye single | | | | | 11:34–36 | | | | |
| Mammon | | | | | | | | | 16:13 |
| Care, food, clothing | 10:29 | | | | | 12:22–34 | | | |
| On judging | | 4:24 | 6:37–38, 41–42 | | | | | | |
| Ask and be given | | | | | 11:9–13 | | | | |
| Golden rule | | | 6:31 | | | | | | |
| Narrow door | | | | | | | 13:23–24 | | |
| Tree known by its fruit | 12:33 | | 6:43–44 | | | | | | |
| Lord, Lord | | | 6:46 | | | | | | |
| Depart workers of iniquity | 25:41 | | | | | | 13:25–27 | | |
| Upon the rock | | | 6:47–49 | | | | | | |

On three occasions, Mark quotes lines found in the Sermon on the Mount. First, after telling the disciples in private the meaning of the parable of the sower, namely that all hearers of the word will be judged by the fruits they bring forth, Jesus told (reminded) the twelve that they too will be judged: Mark 4:21 assumes that they have been given the commission to be the light of the world (Matthew 5:14) and need to take the light abroad; Mark 4:24 reiterates the disciples' obligation to be careful about which voices they hear and obey, a particular application of the general rule that "the measure you give will be the measure you get" (the same as in Matthew 7:2). Second, in Mark 9 Jesus spoke again to the twelve in private. In response to their dispute over who was greatest, Jesus told them again to receive anyone who casts out devils in his name (Mark 9:38–40) and that, on pain of being cast into hell, they should not offend anyone who so much as gives a disciple of Christ a cup of water (Mark 9:41–48). This instruction makes good sense, if one assumes that the twelve have already been told that some who perform miracles in Jesus' name will be told to depart (Matthew 7:22). These people, like children, need to grow and should not be offended. For now, they are not against God. If they come to know the Lord, they will some day enter into his presence. But before that day, "everyone," including the twelve, "will be salted with fire" (Mark 9:49), their own sacrifice salted with salt,[15] and thus they should have salt, or peace, among themselves. The key premise here in Jesus' reprimand, that they are the salt that should not lose its saltiness, remains unstated, presumably because they already know it. Third, after answering in public the question of the Pharisees about divorcing one's wife in Mark 10, Jesus again spoke to his disciples in private about this matter, explaining that the rule among them applies to husbands as well as to wives who divorce their spouse and marry another (Mark 10:11–12), which clarifies and thus may well logically presuppose the teaching on divorce in Matthew 5. In all three of these instances in Mark, the words of the Sermon on the Mount were spoken to disciples in private, consistent with the esoteric nature of these teachings. In all three cases, Jesus explained the disciples' obligations to let their light shine, to receive all who will recognize Christ, and to remain married or not to remarry. In each case, these specific applications or clarifications assume a previous commitment to the underlying obligations in general.

In Luke's Sermon on the Plain in Luke 6, Jesus spoke in public to a large, diverse audience: "a great multitude of people" had come out from all around the region, from Jewish and Greek cities, to hear Jesus (Luke 6:17). Not all in this crowd were faithful disciples, and here Jesus cursed the unruly crowd for being rich, full, haughty, and socially accepted (Luke 6:24–7), and he castigated them for not doing the things he said (Luke 6:46). Although he drew on some parts of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus limited what he said to them, presumably following the rule of not giving the holy thing to those who are unprepared to receive it.

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[15] Several manuscripts, including Alexandrinus and Bezae Cantabrigiensis, add "and every sacrifice shall be salted with salt," obviously recalling a temple connection.

Seeing the Sermon on the Mount as the more sacred presentation explains those omissions in the Sermon on the Plain, which essentially follows the same order as the Sermon on the Mount but contains only the more public elements of the Sermon on the Mount.[16] Missing in Luke 6 are the elements that one would expect to be reserved for the closer circle of righteous disciples, for example the promises to see God or to be called the children of God; the commissions to be the light to the world and the salt of the earth; the demand to keep every minute provision of the law; the rule of avoiding anger against a brother; the instruction to reconcile with brothers in the community of faith before bringing sacrifices to the altar; the higher rules of covenant marriage; the making of covenants by simple oaths; the saying about becoming perfect (here the public is told just to be merciful); praying in secret; fasting, washing, and anointing; keeping the holy thing secret; and entering through the narrow gate into the presence of God.

Elsewhere in Luke, Jesus will speak to his disciples in private about more elevated topics, such as not placing their lamp under a bushel, praying, laying up treasures in heaven, receiving garments and the necessities of life from God, keeping every jot and tittle of the law, following a higher law of divorce, and serving God and not Mammon (see Table 2). In all of these cases, as in Mark, Jesus speaks these words in private. On one occasion, Jesus speaks to an unidentified person about entering in through the narrow gate (Luke 13:23–27), but here also the speaker begins by addressing Jesus as "Lord," and they speak together in confidence. Outside of the Sermon on the Plain, the only words of the Sermon on the Mount that are ever spoken in public by Jesus in the gospel of Luke are (1) the warning not to go to court against an adversary (Luke 12:58–9), which is good general advice; and (2) the warning that tasteless salt will be good for nothing (Luke 14:34–5), which lacks on this occasion the opening commission, "You are the salt of the earth."

In any event, it is highly unlikely that Jesus would have said any of these things only once.[17] Ritual studies enhance our understanding of why these sayings carried numinous power and carried such decisive authority whenever they were used. More than literary source criticism or the analysis of oral tradition or folklore, ritual studies identify these sayings in Mark and Luke as fragments of a formative ritual text, which lends them unassailable authority.

If the Sermon on the Mount was in fact used as a very early initiation ritual, this understanding will also explain why its various elements were quoted so often in the earliest Christian writings. Christian authors could assume that their faithful readers would recognize the original, foundational context of these sayings. Thus, verbal and conceptual similarities between the Sermon on the Mount and the epistle

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[16] Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 372. Similarly, when Jesus repeated in Matthew 18:8–9 the point that it would be better to lose a hand or an eye than one's entire body, only the disciples were present.

[17] Andrej Kodjak, *A Structural Analysis of the Sermon on the Mount* (Berlin, 1986), p. 168.

of James show that James and his audience knew and accepted as authoritative a text that was similar to the Sermon on the Mount. One may compare, for example, James 1:12 with the Beatitudes (using *makarios*, but in a new formula about enduring temptation); James 2:13 with Matthew 5:7 (on the unmerciful receiving judgment without mercy); James 1:19–20 with Matthew 5:22 (on being slow to anger); James 1:14–15 with Matthew 5:28 (on lust leading to sin); James 5:12 with Matthew 5:33–7 (on not swearing oaths by heaven or earth, but only by yes or no); James 1:4 with Matthew 5:48 (on patiently becoming perfect, *teleioi*); James 1:13 with Matthew 6:13 (on God not tempting or being tempted by evil); James 4:11 with Matthew 7:1–2 (on not judging a brother); James 1:5–6 with Matthew 7:7 (on asking of God); James 1:17 with Matthew 7:11 (on good and perfect gifts coming down from heaven); James 3:11–12 with Matthew 7:16–22 (on people not speaking both blessings or curses, as trees produce either good or bad fruit), and James 1:22–25 with Matthew 7:24–7 (on not just hearing the word but doing the word).[18] Jeremias has correctly noted that James and the Sermon on the Mount share the same character as "the classical example of an early Christian *didache*."[19] It seems quite evident that the epistle of James consciously drew on a known body of basic Christian teachings that was used in the community as a persuasive, accepted, and binding text in governing daily life. As with the Sermon on the Plain, James draws mainly on passages from the Sermon on the Mount that have practical, ethical applications, but his selection ranges throughout the Sermon and includes items that presuppose brotherly relations and obligations of righteousness that would apply more within a faithful community than to the public at large.

A similar point can be made with respect to Paul's letters, some of which reflect parts of the Sermon on the Mount,[20] although Paul used this text much less frequently and more loosely than James. Paul's rhetoric may reflect oral rather than literary channels of transmission.[21] The role of memory must not be discounted,[22] especially where ritual texts are involved. In light of the teaching methods of his

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[18] Mentioned in John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in the New Testament," in John W. Welch (ed.), *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis* (Hildesheim 1981; reprinted Provo, Utah, 1999), p. 212. See also Patrick J. Hartin, "James and the Q Sermon on the Mount/Plain," in David J. Lull (ed.), *Society of Biblical Literature 1989 Seminar Papers* (Atlanta, 1989), pp. 440–57, and his *James and the "Q" Sayings of Jesus* (Sheffield, 1991), pp. 140–72. However, the precise nature of the relationship between James and the Sermon remains a puzzle; Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 6, n.13.

[19] Jeremias, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 22.

[20] Compare, for example, Romans 12:14, 17, 19 and 14:10 with Matthew 5:44, 5:15, 5:22, and 7:1–2.

[21] Betz, *Sermon on the Mount*, p. 6 n.12.

[22] Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1998); and Eta Linnemann, *Is There a Synoptic Problem?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1992), pp. 182–5.

day, Jesus "must have required his disciples to memorize,"[23] and memory is never a flawless conveyor. But as Gerhardsson has argued, "Remembering the attitude of Jewish disciples to their master, it is unrealistic to suppose that forgetfulness and the exercise of a pious imagination had too much hand in transforming authentic memories beyond all recognition in the course of a few short decades."[24]

Furthermore, recognizing the preponderance of temple themes in the Sermon on the Mount may also shed light on the prominence of the Temple in the earliest historical memories of Jesus scattered throughout the New Testament. Jesus did not reject the idea of the Temple, which would have been readily understood by his original temple-conscious audience. He desired to reconstitute the temple system in Jerusalem with a way of holiness he promised to raise up without mortal hands (Mark 14:58; compare Daniel 2:34).[25] In John, where recollections of Jesus at the Temple are pervasive (see John 2:13; 5:14–16; 7:10, 28; 8:2), Jesus went to prepare the way to God and guide his friends there (*paralēmpsomai*, John 14:3). "*Paralambanein* is also a technical form for the reception of rites and secrets of the Mysteries."[26] In Acts 15:16–7, the plan was to rebuild the old Temple but this time to allow all people, whether Jewish or not, to seek the Lord's presence there, as Amos 9:11–2 had prophesied. In Hebrews, some early Christians understood that a new temple system had been established by Jesus as Jeremiah had prophesied that, through a spiritually transforming experience, the new temple in the day of the Lord would write the law upon the people "in their inward parts" (Jeremiah 31:33). The new temple would thereby build a covenant people of the heart, not of outward performances of the hand only. The epistle to the Hebrews has much to say about the high priesthood of Christ and related temple imagery (Hebrews 7–10). In the midst of this temple section of this epistle stands the fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy: "For this is the covenant, . . . I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people" (Hebrews 8:10). This covenantal transformation of the heart is precisely what the Sermon on the Mount strives to achieve.

All this is to say that the earliest Christian memory of Jesus was deeply intertwined with the Temple. The reason for this connection must have something to do, not merely with the place where Jesus often stood, but even more with the things that he taught, which involved receiving an endowment of power from on high and entering God's presence. Understanding the Sermon on the Mount as a text that has everything to do with a new order of sacred relationships between God and his people exposes the temple subtext for Jesus' program of temple renewal

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[23] Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript*, p. 328.

[24] Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript*, p. 329.

[25] Bruce Chilton, *The Temple of Jesus: His Sacrificial Program Within a Cultural History of Sacrifice* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 1992), pp. 137–54; on Jesus' position regarding the Temple especially in Mark 14:58, interpreted non-eschatologically, eschatologically, messianicly, and culticly, see Jostein Ådna, *Jesu Stellung zum Tempel* (Tübingen, 2000).

[26] G. Delling, "*Paralambanō*," in *TDNT*, vol. 4, p. 12.

and restoration. He did not aim his mission merely at the fringes of rural Jewish societies; he sought to recreate its very heart. By all measures, that heart stood in Jerusalem on the Temple Mount, in its Holy of Holies.

Seeing the Sermon on the Mount as a focal instrument in Jesus' agenda also explains why the Christians in Jerusalem continued to frequent the Temple after the death of Jesus (Luke 24:53). In the book of Acts, the Temple in Jerusalem continues to figure prominently in the religious lives of the followers of Jesus. It is difficult to imagine that this emphasis on the Temple would have arisen in early Christianity if the teachings of Jesus had not been explicitly understood by his earliest disciples as having much to do with the Temple.

This would also explain why these recollections persist into the writings of the Apostolic Fathers. The Didache—a handbook of instructions concerning the rules required of people converting to Christianity, their baptism, the Eucharist, and the local operation of congregations by prophets, teachers, bishops and deacons—abounds with connections to the Sermon on the Mount.[27] Present in the Didache, among other things, are descriptions of the "two ways" (1:1–6:3), the Golden Rule (1:2), praying for enemies (1:3), turning the other cheek, going the second mile and giving the cloak (1:4), avoiding court (1:5), giving alms (1:6), not swearing falsely (2:3), shunning anger that leads to murder and lust that leads to adultery (3:2–3), being meek and merciful (3:7, 8), becoming perfect by bearing the whole yoke of the Lord (6:2), fasting (before baptism, 7:4), praying the Lord's Prayer (three times a day, 8:2), not giving what is holy to the dogs (9:5), and detecting false prophets (in the local congregations, 11:5). But missing here is any reference to becoming sons of God, seeing God, being the light of the world or the salt of the earth, keeping every jot and tittle of the law, facing the council, treading violators underfoot, sacrificing at the altar, giving alms in secret, washing, anointing, being clothed, asking, seeking, knocking, entering through a narrow gate into the presence of God, and building upon the rock. After the loss of the Temple, temple elements that made sense outside the ambit of the Temple were readily retained in training initiates for baptism and membership as Christians, while it seems that those that did not were dropped or adapted for use outside the temple context. Similarly, in Asia, Ignatius wrote to the Trallians about bonding church members to the temple of their bishops through the mysteries of the elders, and in this new setting but reminiscent of Matthew 5:24 he required, "Let none of you have anything against his neighbor."[28] In the West, the Shepherd of Hermas issued twelve commandments (mandates), several of which are highly reminiscent of the instructions in the Sermon on the Mount.[29] After the destruction of the

[27] See various comments and tables in Kurt Niederwimmer, *The Didache* (Minneapolis, 1998), for example pages 66, 69, 70, 75, 78, 81, 87, 95, 97, 135, 153, 179, 198, 203–4.

[28] Ignatius, *To the Trallians*, 8.

[29] For example, *Shepherd of Hermas*, Mandate 2 (give gifts to all as God gives to all), Mandate 4 (prohibiting remarriage after divorce), Mandate 5 (no anger), Mandate 6 (walk the straight path), and Mandate 11 (distinguishing true prophets from false).

Temple, a sense of loss over the Temple can be detected in Christian writings for many years to come.[30]

If the Sermon on the Mount was in fact used as an esoteric, sacred early Christian ritual, this would go a long way toward explaining such statements as the claim by Eusebius that Clement taught that the Lord had entrusted Peter, James, and John "with the higher knowledge" after the resurrection, which knowledge they shared with the inner circle of early Christian leaders.[31] Clement of Alexandria indeed wrote of his opponents, "They do not enter in as we enter in, through the tradition of the Lord, by drawing aside the curtain," which has been seen as a reference to secrets of the universe being held, or learned, in the holy of holies.[32] Valentinus reportedly taught of an "anointing" that was "superior to baptism," and he reserved certain rites "for the spiritual elite," disclosing these revelations selectively.[33] Origen spoke about mysteries that he would not commit to writing;[34] and Clement reveled in his "truly sacred mysteries," in which the initiate became "holy," was "marked with God's seal," and "ascended to God" to "become even as I am."[35] Augustine's arguments against the Priscillianists show how persistent the idea was in some circles that Christ "delivered a secret initiation" to his disciples, "above all to John."[36] The major difficulty in studying such sacred rituals, of course, is that they were kept secret. Faint clues of these rituals, however, sometimes survived. This emphasis on the esoteric mysteries in early Christianity would seem best explained by the idea that some teachings of Jesus were somehow remembered as having instituted a new sacred order.

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30 Margaret Barker, *Temple Themes in Christian Worship* (London, 2007), pp. 12–18; Hugh W. Nibley, "Christian Envy of the Temple," *JQR* 50 (1959–60): 97–123, 229–40; reprinted in *Mormonism and Early Christianity, Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*, vol. 4 (Salt Lake City, 1987), pp. 391–434.

31 Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, trans. G.A. Williamson (New York, 1981), vol. 2, p. 1, quoting Clement, *Hypotypooesis*, p. 8.

32 Margaret Barker, *Temple Theology: An Introduction* (London, 2004), p. 21, citing Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* vol. 7, p. 17.

33 W.H.C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia, 1984), p. 200. Tertullian remarked that "not even to their own disciples do they commit a secret before they have made sure of them." Tertullian, *Adversus Valentinianos*, p. 1. See also Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, pp. 2, pref.; 3.3.2–3; 3.15.2.

34 Origen, *Commentarii in Epistolam ad Romanos*, vol. 2, p. 4. See C. Wilfred Griggs, "Rediscovering Ancient Christianity," *BYU Studies* 38/4 (1999): 73–90.

35 Clement, *Exhortation to the Greeks*, vol. 12, p. 120. See further sources in Marvin W. Meyer (ed.), *The Ancient Mysteries: A Sourcebook* (San Francisco, 1987), pp. 225–53; Guy G. Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism* (Leiden, 1996).

36 Max Pulver, "Jesus' Round Dance and Crucifixion According to the Acts of John," in *The Mysteries: Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks* (Princeton, 1955), p. 173. Similarly, Thomas is called an "initiate in the hidden word of Christ, who receives his secret oracles," in *Acts of Thomas* 39, in M.R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford, 1924), p. 383.

While the Christian ritual order may not have actually materialized very far beyond the close circle of disciples in Jerusalem and their followers, this nascent ritual program may be discernable in the Sermon on the Mount. Paul battled other Christians who wanted to "undergo initiations beyond baptism," being "perfected" through "mystical initiation."[37] He eventually "secured for baptism its unique status as a ritual of initiation for Christians,"[38] but the difficulties Paul faced in accomplishing this unifying feat would make it apparent that, before and outside of Pauline Christianity, multiple initiations were the norm in some Christian communities. Luke Johnson has recommended a phenomenological approach in assessing the religious experiences of the first Christians, to which "the study of ritual provides an obvious point of access."[39] The present study invites modern readers to understand the Sermon on the Mount in such a light, conducting disciples through a present transformation of sacred instruction in order to commit them to a life of present discipleship and to prepare them to withstand the future day of God's judgment and to enter into his presence. These and other issues bear fruitful reflection.

The temptation at this point is almost irresistible to suggest further inferences that might flow from this reading of the Sermon on the Mount. For the time being, however, it suffices to set that process in motion. Much more remains to be considered beyond what can be mentioned here. Left for other occasions must be discussions of such things as: the relation of this approach to conventional understandings of the composition and meaning of the Sermon on the Mount; the temple connotations of the Hebrew or Aramaic antecedents behind the Greek vocabulary of the Sermon on the Mount and the Septuagint; the stance of the Sermon on the Mount toward the Temple vis-à-vis the attitudes of other Jewish groups about the Temple;[40] detailed analysis of the contexts of parallels to certain phrases in the Sermon on the Mount found in the Dead Sea Scrolls and in rabbinic literature;[41] the relevance of this approach to the many previous studies on the historical Jesus, his position on the Law and the Temple;[42] the implications of this reading for the synoptic question; the bearing of these findings on the presence of temple themes elsewhere in the New Testament; the application of these results in a full comparison of early Christian initiation practices to Hellenistic mystery religions; and the use of these insights in evaluating the presentation in the Book

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[37] Luke T. Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis, 1998), pp. 99, 101.

[38] Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity,* p. 103.

[39] Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity,* p. 69.

[40] This topic is introduced in Bauckham, "Parting of the Ways," pp. 135–51.

[41] As a basis for comparison, see such works as Samuel T. Lachs, *A Rabbinic Commentary on the New Testament* (New York, 1987), and his "Some Textual Observations on the Sermon on the Mount," *JQR* 69/2 (1978): 98–111.

[42] For example, William R.G. Loader, *Jesus' Attitude towards the Law: A Study of the Gospels* (Tübingen, 1997; reprinted Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2002).

of Mormon (3 Nephi 12–14) of a text much like the Sermon on the Mount, which appears there in an explicit temple setting involving theophany, commandments, covenant making, and messianic blessings, all copiously intertwined with temple themes.[43]

In conclusion, the light of the Temple opens new perspectives on the Sermon on the Mount, its vocabulary, unity, potency, functionality, morality, and spirituality. An awareness of its mountain setting, its extensive use of the Psalms, and its embodiment of numerous temple themes provides leverage in appreciating the Sermon on the Mount's foundational voice. Unveiling the mysteries of the Sermon on the Mount in the light of the Temple and its traditional Old Testament roots opens valuable insights into its extraordinary ability to communicate a clear moral vision, to instil a firm commitment to its precepts, to engender a spiritual sense of purpose in life, to forge a shared community ethic, and to bridge between heaven and earth in binding human hearts to serve the Lord and love God with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength.

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[43] The temple context of 3 Nephi 12–14 was first explicated in John W. Welch, *Illuminating the Sermon at the Temple and Sermon on the Mount* (Provo, Utah, 1999), 26–101.