**“I will build another, not made with hands” (Mark 14:58):**

**Authentic or Apocryphal Words of Jesus?**

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**Introduction**

Unlike the prevailing tendency among some scholars in the first half of the twentieth century to interpret the figure of Jesus in light of rabbinic Judaism (as was the case with H. Strack and P. Billerbeck’s classical Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch [1922-28]), the second half of the century featured the use of archaeology, the recovery of Jewish pseudepigrapha literature, and the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, which made significant contributions to understanding the historical Jesus in the context of 1st century CE Palestinian Judaism.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Scholars such as Flusser, Sanders, Charlesworth and Vermes, among others, considered the canonical Gospels to be the primary sources of historical information about Jesus. However, the manipulation of authentic traditions about Jesus by the writers/editors of these texts based on their own theological agenda often prevents us from reaching the historical truth behind Jesus’ words or deeds. Of the different methodologies developed to overcome this obstacle, one way to control for the historical value of traditions concerning Jesus preserved in the canonical Gospels is to examine them through the lens of Second Temple Jewish literature, which has not been manipulated or modified by late Christian scribes, and seems to be faithful testimony to an ancient, reliable and independent Jewish heritage.

The purpose of this presentation is to explore as a case study the words attributed to Jesus in Mark 14:58: “We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands (χειροποίητον), and in three days I will build another, not made with hands (ἀχειροποίητον)”.[[2]](#footnote-2) My working hypothesis is that Mark has probably preserved an echo of an authentic saying of Jesus, whose historical value can be positively established when evaluated against the backdrop of Second Temple Jewish literature.

**Part I**

**The Literary Setting of Mark 14:58**

The literary setting of our text (Mark 14:58) is Jesus’ appearance in the courtyard of the High Priest before the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes (vv. 53-65). According to Mark, this event happened at night immediately after Jesus’ imprisonment in Gethsemane (vv. 43-52). This informal appearance, according to this Gospel, was the first of two by Jesus before the Sanhedrin (τὸ συνέδριον): a more formal one occurred the following morning (15:1). This development of the events is also followed by Matthew's version (26:57-68; 27:1-2).

According to Flusser's reconstruction of the events,[[3]](#footnote-3) the appearance of Jesus at night, followed by a second the next morning, never really happened. It would have been a fictional construction by Mark, followed by Matthew. In his view, the most accurate description of the events would be Luke's version,[[4]](#footnote-4) according to which Jesus would have appeared only once before “the assembly of the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes” at the Council (“Sanhedrin” [τὸ συνέδριον]) (22:66-71). On that occasion, Jesus was forced to undergo a formal and decisive investigation, in order to find good reasons to deliver him to the Roman governor for judgment and eventual punishment.

In comparison to Mark and Matthew’s recounting, Luke’s testimony seems to be an abridged version of the supposed interrogation carried out by the High Priest to Jesus. According to Luke’s report of the events, the questioning of Jesus would have focused on a single question: whether or not Jesus considered himself to be the Messiah (22:67. Cf. 23:2). In Mark and Matthew’s accounts, nonetheless, the question concerning the identity of the Messiah (Mark 14:61; Matt. 26:63) follow the testimony provided by witnesses about Jesus’ words regarding the destruction and rebuilding of the Temple:

* Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, “We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.'” (Mark 14:57-58)
* At last two came forward and said, “This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'” (Matt. 26: 60b-61)

Although these versions differ both in terms of the nature of the testimonies (Mark states that it was a “false testimony” [ἐψευδομαρτύρουν])[[5]](#footnote-5) and their specific wordings, they agree in not specifying the setting in which Jesus referred to the destruction and subsequent rebuilding of the Temple. If Jesus, as argued, certainly said these words, when would he have said them?

The answer to this question seems to be found in the Gospel of John, according to which, Jesus would have alluded to the destruction and rebuilding of the Temple on occasion of his violent actions against vendors and money changers in the Temple courtyard:

The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!” […] The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. (John 2:13-19)

John’s narrative situates this event at the beginning of Jesus’ career. Although the present position of the episode and some of its details (like the presence of sheep and cattle in the Temple) would not be historical according to most scholars, the basic events might reflect actual historical circumstances in general terms.[[6]](#footnote-6) If the events did happen, however, Jesus' words about the Temple would have been pronounced before his actions, and not afterwards as suggested by John, since it is difficult to imagine that Jesus would have had the opportunity to deliver a speech without being disturbed or persecuted by the crowd after his violent actions.[[7]](#footnote-7)

According to the reconstruction of the events proposed here, the historical Jesus could certainly have referred to the destruction and eventual rebuilding of the Temple on occasion of driving out the vendors and money changers from the Sanctuary. That event would not have happened at the beginning of Jesus' career, as stated by John, but at the end of his public ministry, as retold by the Synoptic Gospels. These dramatic events, which would have cast Jesus as the main protagonist, would have finally motivated the priests of the Temple to deliver him to the Roman authorities for representing a threat to public welfare and undermining their class interests.

**Part II**

**Jesus’ Action in the Temple**

**in its Literary and Historical Context**

Now that the probable setting of Jesus’ words about the Temple has been clarified, we are ready to explore the meaning of his action in the Temple. The nature of the scene is crucial for our purposes, as it ultimately determines the way Jesus' words are articulated in this specific literary setting.

Let’s begin with the four versions of this scene in the Gospels:

1. Then they came to Jerusalem. And he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling and those who were buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves; and he would not allow anyone to carry anything through the temple. He was teaching and saying, “Is it not written, '*My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations*' [Isa. 56:7]? But you have made it *a den of robbers* [Jer. 7:11].” (Mark 11:15-17)
2. Then Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who were selling and buying in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money changers and the seats of those who sold doves. He said to them, “It is written, '*My house shall be called a house of prayer*' [Isa. 56:7]; but you are making it *a den of robbers* [Jer. 7:11].” (Matt. 21:12-13)
3. Then he entered the temple and began to drive out those who were selling things there; and he said, “It is written, '*My house shall be a house of prayer*' [Isa. 56:7]; but you have made it *a den of robbers* [Jer. 7: 11].” (Luke 19:45-46)
4. The Passover of the Jews was near, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. In the temple he found people selling cattle, sheep, and doves, and the money changers seated at their tables. Making a whip of cords, he drove all of them out of the temple, both the sheep and the cattle. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. He told those who were selling the doves, “Take these things out of here! Stop making my Father's house a marketplace!” His disciples remembered that it was written, “*Zeal for your house will consume me* [Ps. 69:10].” (John 2:13-17)

This event has received innumerable interpretations, many from the same scholars, which often complement each other and are not mutually exclusive. Some have interpreted Jesus’ action, which would have taken place in the Portico or Royal Basilica, located at the southern end of the “Court of the Gentiles,” in a literal and concrete manner. They argue that the reason for his action was to denounce: 1) the injustice and abuse by the priests (Evans, Charlesworth, Perrin); 2) the commercial activities in the House of God and its functioning (Evans, Casey); 3) the inclusion of gentiles and the sacrificial system as such (Ådna); 4) the money impregnated with moral impurity (Regev); 5) the use of pagan coins (Charlesworth); 6) corruption in general (Wassen); and 7) the presence and abuse of merchants in the Temple area (Evans, Perrin).[[8]](#footnote-8)

Another interpretation that has garnered the support of many scholars (Sanders, Flusser, Ehrman)[[9]](#footnote-9) is that Jesus’ action was a symbolic-prophetic sign of the destruction of the Temple. This symbolic action would have been one of the many symbolic actions performed by the Galilean during his ministry, such as eating with sinners, choosing the Twelve Apostles, entering Jerusalem, and eating the Last Supper, in total harmony with the way the classical prophets used to behave.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The interpretation of Jesus’ action as a symbolic sign of destruction may be supported by two arguments. On the one hand, when, according to the Synoptic Gospels Jesus would have alluded to Jeremiah’s criticism by using the words “a den of robbers” (Jer. 7:11) (Mark 11:17; Matt. 21:13; Luke 19:46), he implicitly would have wanted to threaten the Jews with the possible imminent destruction of the Temple, unless they improved their behavior. In this sense, Jesus would have behaved as Jeremiah when he warned the Judahites that the Temple would be destroyed because of their sins (7:14; cf. 26:4-6).[[11]](#footnote-11) On the other hand, Jesus’ explicit reference to the future destruction of the Temple, as testified by John’s version, might have been the perfect complement to, and culmination or anticipation of, such an action.

The articulation of criticism of the Temple, whatever it was, coupled with the announcement of its destruction, as we have them in Jesus’ story, fits perfectly with some literary evidence on this topic.[[12]](#footnote-12) It is a fact that since the time of the Hasmoneans, reproach of the priests’ state of impurity and defilement of the Temple became a recurrent theme in the apocrypha literature and the Dead Sea Scrolls. As reviewed by Evans, by the end of the Second Temple years the Jerusalem priesthood had become discredited among some pious Jewish circles, casting a shadow of doubt regarding their sacred and pure nature (cf. *Jub.* 23:21; *T. Levi* 14:1-15:2; 17:11; *Pss. Sol.* 2:3; 8:8-12.21-22).[[13]](#footnote-13) A strident criticism along these lines appears in the *Vision of the Animals*, apparently an independent literary unit (chaps. 85-90) of the *Book of Dreams* (chaps. 83-90) in the current *1Enoch*,[[14]](#footnote-14)which uses strong language to reproach the efficacy of the rituals carried out in the Temple of Jerusalem during the time of the Maccabees:

They again began to build as before; and they raised up that tower which is called the high tower. But they started to place a table before the tower, with all the food which is upon it being polluted and impure. (*1Enoch* 89: 73)[[15]](#footnote-15)

Another example of this theme is the testimony presented in the Damascus Document, a second-century-B.C.E. Jewish work from Qumran,[[16]](#footnote-16) which states that the impurity of the Temple is one of the nets by which Satan tries to catch Israel:

Interpreted, these are the three nets of Satan with which Levi son of Jacob said that he catches Israel by setting them up as three kinds of righteousness. The first is fornication, the second is riches, and the third is profanation of the Temple. (CD IV, 14-18)[[17]](#footnote-17)

This atmosphere of growing criticism towards the priestly class and the Temple led Jews of those years, as Jeremiah had centuries before, to conceive of the possibility that Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed. An example of this is the testimony of Flavius Josephus regarding the oracle announced by Jesus, son of Ananias, while walking through the streets of the city:

But a further portent was even more alarming. Four years before the war, when the city was enjoying profound peace and prosperity, there came to the feast at which it is the custom of all Jews to erect tabernacles to God, one Jesus, son of Ananias, a rude peasant, who, standing in the temple, suddenly began to cry out, “A voice from the east, a voice from the west, a voice from the four winds; a voice against Jerusalem and the sanctuary, a voice against the bridegroom and the bride, a voice against all the people.” […] During the whole period up to the outbreak of war he neither approached nor was seen talking to any of the citizens, but daily, like a prayer that he had conned, repeated his lament, “Woe to Jerusalem!” (*War* VI, v, 3 §§ 300-301, 306)[[18]](#footnote-18)

This oracle of destruction by Jesus, son of Ananias, closely resembles traditions in the Gospels that depict Jesus announcing the upcoming destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple:[[19]](#footnote-19)

* When you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation has come near. Then those in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those inside the city must leave it, and those out in the country must not enter it; for these are days of vengeance, as a fulfillment of all that is written. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing infants in those days! (Luke 21:20-23. Cf. Matt. 24:15-20; Mark 13:14-18)
* When some were speaking about the temple, how it was adorned with beautiful stones and gifts dedicated to God, he said, “As for these things that you see, the days will come when not one stone will be left upon another; all will be thrown down.” (Luke 21:5-6. Cf. Mark 13:1-2; Matt. 24:1-2)

If the historical Jesus would have announced the imminent destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple on different occasions, then it is highly possible that, as John's version testifies, he may also have referred to the upcoming destruction of the Temple on occasion of the violent actions he took there against the vendors and money changers.

Now, let’s focus on the very words that the Gospels attribute to Jesus on the destruction of the Temple. The traditions in Scripture exhibit subtle variations concerning what he would have actually said on such an occasion:

1. I will destroy (Ἐγὼ καταλύσω) this temple that is made with hands (τὸν ναὸν τοῦτον τὸν χειροποίητον)… (Mark 14:58)

b) I am able to destroy (Δύναμαι καταλῦσαι) the temple of God (τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ)… (Matt. 26:61)

c) Destroy (Λύσατε) this temple (τὸν ναὸν)… (John 2:19)

A comparison of the versions leads us to conclude that Mark and Matthew, despite their differences, seem to preserve an echo of the true words used by Jesus. Unlike the awkward imperative formulation of Jesus’ words in John, the historical Jesus would probably have formulated his words in the first person. His words, however, would not have literally meant that it was in his capacity to destroy the Temple by himself; rather as a spokesperson for God,[[20]](#footnote-20) he would have announced in His name that God would destroy the Temple.

Whatever Jesus’ original intention, the people certainly misunderstood his words, assuming that he meant that he *himself* would destroy the Temple. A proof of this is what people said in mockery when they saw Jesus hanging on the cross:

Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, “Aha! You who would destroy (καταλύων) the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!”

(Mark 15:29-30. Cf. Matt. 27:39-40)

Although this reference to Jesus’ own capacity to destroy the Temple does not appear in Luke’s version of this same scene (23:35-37), the evangelist demonstrates his knowledge of this tradition[[21]](#footnote-21) when he refers to the “false witnesses” who testified against Stephen, which establishes a clear parallel between this first martyr and Jesus:

They set up false witnesses who said, “This man never stops saying things against this holy place and the law; for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy (καταλύσει) this place and will change the customs that Moses handed on to us.”

(Acts 6:13-14)

An indirect proof of the antiquity and accuracy of Mark and Matthew’s formulation of Jesus’ first person saying, “I will destroy,” is the testimony found in the *Gospel of Thomas* among the writings of Nag Hammadi,[[22]](#footnote-22) stating that “Jesus said: 'I shall throw down [this] building, and no one will be able to build it […]'” (71).[[23]](#footnote-23)

In summary, everything leads us to conclude that the historical Jesus, seeing the moral corruption prevailing in the Temple,[[24]](#footnote-24) would have followed in the footsteps of the prophet Jeremiah centuries before to announce the upcoming destruction of the Temple by God Himself.[[25]](#footnote-25)

**Part III**

**Mark 14:58 in Light of Second Temple Literature**

Unlike Jeremiah, however, the historical Jesus would not have only referred to the Temple’s upcoming destruction, but also alluded to its eventual rebuilding. Let's look at the different formulations of his statement according to the Gospels:

1. We heard him say, “I will destroy this temple that is made with hands (χειροποίητον), and in three days I will build (οἰκοδομήσω) another, not made with hands (ἀχειροποίητον).” (Mark 15:48)
2. At last two came forward and said, “This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it (οἰκοδομῆσαι) in three days.'” (Matt. 26: 60b-61)
3. The Jews then said to him, “What sign can you show us for doing this?” Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise (ἐγερῶ) it up.” (John 2:19)

As Jesus’ intention was not to eliminate the Temple, but to promote its radical renewal,[[26]](#footnote-26) his threat to destroy the Temple would have been complemented by announcing the restoration of a future Temple in the coming eschatological era. In general terms, this announcement was in full agreement with the paradigm in vogue during Second Temple Judaism, according to which the present Temple would be replaced by a new or renewed perfect one. The oldest testimony of this paradigm is presented in the apocryphal/deuterocanonical book of Tobit, an historical novel dated to the late third or early second century BCE:[[27]](#footnote-27)

But God will again have mercy on them, and God will bring them back into the land of Israel; and they will rebuild the temple of God, but not like the first one until the period when the times of fulfillment shall come. After this they all will return from their exile and will rebuild Jerusalem in splendor; and in it the temple of God will be rebuilt, just as the prophets of Israel have said concerning it.  (14:5)[[28]](#footnote-28)

According to this text, the builder of the future Temple will be the people of Israel. From this tradition onward, however, the rest of the literary testimonies of the Hellenistic-Roman era all emphasize that the builder of the Temple will be God Himself (*1Enoch* 90:28-29; *Jubilees* 1:17). As an example, the *Temple Scroll*, a Dead Sea text discovered in cave 11 in 1956,[[29]](#footnote-29)puts the following words into God’s mouth:

I will dwell with them for ever and ever and will sanctify my [sa]nctuary by my glory. I will cause my glory to rest on it until the day of creation[[30]](#footnote-30) on which I will shall create my sanctuary [אשר אברא אני את מקדשי],[[31]](#footnote-31) establishing it for myself for all the time according to the covenant which I have made with Jacob in Bethel. (XXIX, 7-10)

The authors of all these literary sources from the Second Temple era had a perfect eschatological Temple of divine origin in mind. Would this have also been the case for Jesus?

A clear Christological interpretation of Jesus’ words is already present at a very early stage of the Gospel tradition, indicated by John and his circle, understanding them as referring to his own resurrection:

But he was speaking of the temple of his body (περὶ τοῦ ναοῦ τοῦ σώματος αὐτοῦ). After he was raised (ἠγέρθη)[[32]](#footnote-32) from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they believed the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken. (John 2:21-22)

Modern commentators suggest that John’s explicit interpretation is also hinted by Mark 14:58. Sylva, for example, argues that “in the context of Mark’s Gospel this temple ʻnot built with handsʼ must mean that Jesus himself is the new temple because it is on the third day that Jesus rises from the dead (Mark 15:42-16:7).”[[33]](#footnote-33)

However, some other modern Christian scholars believe that Mark 14:58 testifies to an alternative ancient Christian reinterpretation of Jesus’ words. According to them, Mark would have used the expression “not made with hands” (ἀχειροποίητον), which “seems to be a New Testament coinage”[[34]](#footnote-34) (cf. 2 Cor. 5:1), to indicate that Jesus was hinting to the Church as God’s temple (see 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:18-22; 1 Pet. 2:5). In this sense, Mark would have asserted that this institution, with Jesus as its foundational cornerstone (cf. Mark 12:10-11), was going to replace the obsolete institution of the Jewish Temple.

According to this reading, the value of Mark's testimony is not as a trustworthy reflection of Jesus’ words, but as an example of how Jesus’ remarks on the Temple were interpreted by early Christians. As Sweet says: “But Jesus had said something about the Temple, which could be understood as a sentence of destruction and replacement, and the Christian communities saw themselves as the New Temple which he would build.”[[35]](#footnote-35)

An example of how Mark and his readers could have articulated Jesus’ words about the Temple in a Christian fashion is Heil’s formulation of them: “Jesus says, ‘I will build’ (οἰκοδομήσω) another sanctuary ‘not made by human hands,’ a sanctuary constructed by God himself (14:58). This corresponds to his becoming the cornerstone of a new temple when the Lord God raises him from the dead after he has been killed by the builders (οἰκοδομοῦντες) of the old temple (12:10-11). Whereas those conducting the business of sacrificial worship for the old temple sanctuary made by hands (χειροποίητος, 14:58) have made it a den of robbers (11:17), the new sanctuary not made by human hands (ἀχειροποίητος) that Jesus will build will be called God’s own building (οἶκός) of prayer for all peoples (11:17).”[[36]](#footnote-36)

Hooker goes even further, stating that the entire phrase attributed to Jesus in Mark 14:58 is completely apocryphal, and irrelevant for recovering the words of the historical Jesus: “And did he ever say anything like the saying attributed to him in Mark 14.58: 'I will destroy this temple, and in three days build another'? Now that particular saying worries me because it is absent from Luke, who has transferred the whole scene to the trial of Stephen. But *has* he transferred it? Or is Luke perhaps right? Is this in fact a dispute between Church and synagogue which the other evangelists have transferred to the lifetime of Jesus? Does Mark perhaps give this away by his use of the terms χειροποίητος and ἀχειροποίητος?”[[37]](#footnote-37)

Unlike the exegetical strategy adopted by some Christian scholars, what evidence can be provided to argue that Mark 14:58, if not *verbatim*, isat least an echo of the words actually used by Jesus? It is precisely at this crossroads that the Dead Sea Scrolls have something to say as ancient, reliable, and independent Jewish writings, not transmitted or manipulated by Christian scribes. More specifically, I want to focus on a document known as *4QFlorilegium*, or as a *Midrash on the Last Days* (4Q174).

This unique manuscript, composed of twenty-six fragments, is written in Herodian script and dated to the end of the first century BCE or the beginning of the first century CE. This group of large fragments was first published by J. Allegro (*JBL* 77 [1958], pp. 350-354; *DJD* V [1968], pp. 53-57). In two columns of writing, there is the end of a thematic *pesher*,or commentary, on 2 Samuel 7:10-14, and the start of another *pesher* on Psalms (1:1; 2:1).[[38]](#footnote-38)

The section relevant for our purpose is the beginning, where the anonymous writer, probably a member of the Qumran Community, interprets 2 Samuel 7:10-11 as referring to three temples: the eschatological temple (line 3), the Sanctuary of Israel (the existing polluted sanctuary, like the previous temple that was destroyed because of the people’s sins) (lines 5-6), and the מקדש אדם (*miqdāš ʼādām*) (line 6) (translated variously as: “Sanctuary of men” [Vermes]; “Sanctuary amongst men” [Flusser]; “sanctuary of Adam” [Wise]; or “a man-made temple” [Schwartz]; among others).[[39]](#footnote-39) Most specifically, the first two temples are decisive for our argumentation, since they are presented as totally opposed by nature: the present – earthly and desecrated; and the eschatological – perfect and divine:

…[*I will appoint a place for my people Israel and will plant them that they may dwell there and be troubled no more by their*] *enemies. No son of iniquity* [*shall afflict them again*] *as formerly, from the day that* [*I set judges*] *over my people Israel* (2 Sam. VII, 10).

… This is the House which [He will build for him[[40]](#footnote-40) in the] last days (הואה הבית אשר [יכין[[41]](#footnote-41) ]לוא באחרית הימים), as it is written in the book of Moses, *In the sanctuary which Thy hands have established, O Lord, the Lord shall reign for ever and ever* (Exod. XV, 17-18). This is the House into which [the unclean shall] never [enter nor the uncircumcised], nor the Ammonite, nor the Moabite, nor the half-breed, nor the foreigner, nor the stranger, ever; for there shall My Holy Ones be. [Its glory shall endure] for ever; it shall appear above it perpetually. And strangers shall lay it waste no more, as they formerly laid waste the Sanctuary of Israel because of its sin... (col. I, 1-6)

Already in 1958, a short time after the publication of this manuscript by Allegro, Flusser was the first to notice its relevance for evaluating the words of Jesus in Mark 14:58, arguing: “In my opinion, the parallel between this sectarian midrash and the saying in Mark XIV, 58 is very striking indeed. In both texts the expectation of a new temple is linked with a negative attitude to the existing sanctuary. Jesus called the Temple a ‘den of thieves’ (Mark XI, 17; Matt. XXI, 13; Luke XIX, 46) and our midrash says that it is ‘desolate’, viz. polluted. […] Thus the apocalypse ascribed to Enoch,[[42]](#footnote-42) the words put into Jesus’ mouth in the Gospel, our midrash, and the late Jewish legend amply attested in Talmudic literature,[[43]](#footnote-43) all share the belief in a new temple, *not made with hands*. It was this belief that led the author of our midrash to link Exod. xv, 17 ‘a sanctuary of the Lord thy hands have established’, with the prophecy of Nathan in 2 Sam. vii, 11 on the future house. It is therefore quite possible that the saying of Jesus is also ultimately dependent on a similar interpretation of Exod. xv, 17.”[[44]](#footnote-44)

According to Flusser’s analysis, as I understand it, he recognized in Mark 14:58 a testimony of the words of the historical Jesus, which contrasted the earthly Temple “made with hands” (χειροποίητον)[[45]](#footnote-45) condemned to be destroyed, with another eschatological one “not made with hands” (ἀχειροποίητον) to be built by God Himself,[[46]](#footnote-46) similar to the exegetical tradition present in 4Q174. However, against Flusser’s suggestion, the historical Jesus would not necessarily have used Exod. 15:17 as a proof-text, as 4Q174 does. Another possibility is that Jesus, as depicted in Mark, might have had a different proof-text in mind: the one referenced by Stephen in his speech in Acts (perhaps a tradition originating in Jesus himself?), in which he said:

Yet the Most High does not dwell in [*houses*][[47]](#footnote-47) made with human hands (χειροποιήτοις); as the prophet says, “Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. What kind of house (οἶκον) will you build (οἰκοδομήσετε) for me, says the Lord, or what is the place of my rest? Did not my hand (ἡ χείρ μου) make (ἐποίησε) all these things? [Isa. 66:1-2a].” (Acts 7:48-50)

In these words, there is a contrast between “[houses]” made by “human hands” (χειροποιήτοις)[[48]](#footnote-48) and another made by “the hand of God” (ἡ χείρ μου), which recalls the opposition presented in Mark 14:58 between a Temple (τὸν ναóν) “made with hands” (χειροποίητον) and another “not made with hands” (ἀχειροποίητον). If such were the case, Isa. 66:1-2a could be a legitimate candidate as the proof-text Jesus had in mind when he announced the rebuilding of the eschatological Temple according to Mark’s version, especially considering the fact that “Isaiah was an important text for Jesus.”[[49]](#footnote-49) If so, this last option can be seriously taken into account as an alternative proof-text used by Jesus on occasion of announcing the destruction and rebuilding of the Temple.[[50]](#footnote-50)

The contrast between a man-made and non-man-made Temple is also referenced in the *Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch* (*2 Baruch*), a Jewish “historical” apocalyptic work, probably written originally in Hebrew between the fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. and before the Bar Kokhba Revolt of 132-135 C.E.[[51]](#footnote-51) In this work, the anonymous writer puts the following words of consolation in God's mouth on the occasion of Jerusalem’s impending destruction:

And the Lord said to me: This city will be delivered up for a time, and the people will be chastened for a time, and the world will be not forgotten. Or do you think that this is the city of which I said: “On the palms of my hand I have carved you? [Isa. 49:16]” It is not this building that is in your midst now; it is that which will be revealed with me that was already prepared from the moment that I decided to create Paradise. (4:1-4)

The present text, wherein the city of Jerusalem and the Temple are articulated as a single inseparable identity, establishes a manifest relationship between a transcendent and pre-existent city-temple and the theme of the “palms of God.” According to Nir, this work assumed that “the historical Jerusalem and the temple, which were built by man on earth, were from the outset inferior and condemned to a limited life span, as against the heavenly Jerusalem and sanctuary, which were formed by God in hoary antiquity and will enjoy eternal existence.”[[52]](#footnote-52)

The structural tension between a made-man and non-made-man temple implied in *2 Baruch* is expressly manifested in another apocalyptic work related tothis last source: *4 Ezra* --an early Jewish apocalypse, probably originally written in Hebrew or Aramaic, in Palestine near the end of the first century C.E.[[53]](#footnote-53)The visionaryin this work portrays the heavenly Jerusalem*,* which will be revealed and seen by all amidst the coming final days and the apperance of the Messiah. At that time, “the mountain carved out without hands (*sine manibus*)” (= Zion) (13:36)[[54]](#footnote-54) will become visible in place of the building made by human hands: “for no work of man’s building (*opus aedificii hominis*) could endure in a place where the city of the Most High was to be revealed” (10:54).

**Conclusions**

As can be learnt from different literary sources of Second Temple Judaism (i.e., *4Q174*, Acts 7, *2 Baruch*, and *4 Ezra*), the ontological difference between the historical Temple “made with hands" and the eschatological one “not made with hands” was a clear-cut theological *topos* widespread in ancient Judaism.

In light of this finding, Jesus’ words in Mark 14:58 might certainly be an echo of his *ipsissima verba*, reflecting this same religious motif concerning the Jerusalem Temple. If such were the case, then, the proposal suggested by previous Christian scholars that the words of Jesus “not made with hands” in Mark 14:58 Jesus referred to himself, or were created by early Christians to refer to the Church as God’s Temple, would seem to be anachronistic.

A more general lesson from this case study is that carefully reading of the traditions presented in the Gospels about Jesus in light of Second Temple Jewish literature may help us recover reliable words of his original message for the benefit of all humankind.

1. # For example, *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. James C. Charlesworth (New York: Doubleday, 1992); John J. Rousseau and R. Arav, *Jesus and His World: An Archaeological and Cultural Dictionary* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1995); James H. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha and the New Testament. Prolegomena for the Study of Christian Origins* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998).

   [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Unless otherwise indicated, all New Testament quotations are from the online New Revised Standard Version (<https://www.biblestudytools.com/nrs/>). The Greek text is from the online SBL Greek New Testament version (<https://www.biblegateway.com/versions/SBL-Greek-New-Testament-SBLGNT/#booklist>). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. David Flusser, *Jesus*, trans. Aryeh Kofsky(Or Yehuda: Kinneret, Zmora-Bitan, Dvir Publishing House Ltd./The Hebrew University Magness Press, Jerusalem, 2009), 197-198 (in Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, John is completely unaware of Jesus’ interrogation before the Sanhedrin (18:12-24). According to Petitfils, this version would be correct from the historical point of view. See Jean-Christian Petitfils, *El Jesús de la historia. Reconstrucción de su vida según el método histórico y los hallazgos más recientes*, trans. T. Onaindia Gascón (Móstoles [Madrid]: Gaia Ediciones, 2013), 274-276. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. According to Perrin, “from Mark’s point of view, the witnesses were ‘false’ not because they fabricated the truth, but because they twisted it in competing directions with spiteful intent” (Nicholas Perrin, *Jesus the Temple* [Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2010], 103). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See Flusser, *Jesus*, 191 n. 4. In Wassen’s opinion, “[g]iven the double attestation of the incident (Mark 11:15-17; John 2:14-17), the coherence with Jesus’s role as a prophet, and a possible embarrassment over the episode in the church, the historicity of the temple incident is rarely disputed” (Cecilia Wassen, “The Use of the Dead Sea Scrolls for Interpreting Jesus’s Action in the Temple,” *Dead Sea Discoveries* 23/3 [2016], 282). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. I thank Prof. Antonio Piñero for this comment (personal communication). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Craig A. Evans, “Jesus’ Action in the Temple and Evidence of Corruption in the First-Century Temple,” in *SBL 1989 Seminar Papers*, ed. David J. Lull (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 522-539; “Opposition to the Temple: Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls,” in: *Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 235-253. James C. Charlesworth, “Jesus and the Temple,” in *Jesus and the Temple. Textual and Archaeological Explorations*, idem (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 1-17. Maurice Casey, “Culture and Historicity: The Cleansing of the Temple,” *CBQ* 59 (1997), 306-332. Jostein Ådna, “Jesus’ Symbolic Act in the Temple (Mark 11,15-17): The Replacement of the Sacrificial Cult by his Atoning Death,” in *Gemeinde Ohne Temple/Community Without Temple*, eds. Beate Ego, Armin Lange and Peter Pilhofer (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 461-475. Eyal Regev, “Moral Impurity and the Temple in Early Christianity in Light of Ancient Greek Practice and Qumranic Ideology,” *HTR* 97/4 (2004), 383-411. Perrin, *Jesus the Temple*, 92-99. Wassen, “The Use of the Dead Sea Scrolls,” 285-287. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ed P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 61-71. Bart D. Ehrman, *Jesús, el profeta judío apocalíptico*, trans., M. del Carmen Blanco Moreno and R. A. Díez Aragón (Barcelona-Buenos Aires-México: Paidós, 2001), 262-266. Flussser, *Jesus*, 191-193. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Cf. Isa. 20:3; Jer. 19:1-13; 27:28; Ezek. 4-5; 12:1-16; 24:15-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. On this topic, see Ross E. Winkle, “The Jeremiah Model for Jesus in the Temple,” *AUSS* 24 (1986), 155-72. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. On warnings of destruction of the Temple and accusations of sins as coming together in biblical tradition, see Jer 7:1-15; Ezek 22:23-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Contrary to the position assumed by Evans (see above n. 8), according to which literary testimonies would certainly be evidence of concrete corruption among priests, Wassen argues that this assumption is baseless. In her opinion, “rather than providing evidence for actual corruption it is more likely that the accusations against the temple and its priesthood reflect apocalyptic expectations” (“The Use of the Dead Sea Scrolls,” 293). If such were the case, then, these written witnesses would not be a clear-cut evidence for what priests actually did or did not in real life. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The *Book of Dreams* was probably written between 165-164 BCE at the time of the Maccabees uprising, or shortly afterwards. For details, see Daniel Assefa, s.v. “Dreams, Book of,” in *The Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism* [EDEJ], eds. John J. Collins and Daniel C. Harlow (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 552-553. On the *Vision of the Animals*,see Devorah Dimant, “History according to the Vision of the Animals (Ethiopic Enoch 85-90),” in *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1, 2 (1982A), 18-37 (in Hebrew). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Unless otherwise indicated, all the quotations from the Pseudepigrapha are from James C. Charlesworth (ed.), *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha,* 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1983-85). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. On this document, see Charlotte Hempel, s.v. “Damascus Document,” in *EDEJ*, 510-512. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from the scrolls are from Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English*. Revised and extended fourth edition (London: Penguin Books, 1995). Following her interpretative line, Wassen argues that this one and other testimonies in the Dead Sea Scrolls about the impurity of the Temple and the corruption of the priesthood (see 1QHab 8:8-12; 9:5, 9; 12:8-9 and 4QpNah 1:11) are “self-fulfilled prophecies.” In her words, “[i]t would not matter much what the priests did; the sectarians would accuse the priesthood of general corruption and defilement of the temple, since they believed they were living in the end time when these things would occur” (“The Use of the Dead Sea Scrolls,” 299). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. According to J*osephus* with an English translation by Henry St. J. Thackeray, vol. III: The Jewish War, Books IV-VI (London: W. Heinemann LTD/Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1928; reprinted 1961). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. But still there is a clear and significant difference between the two: Jesus, son of Ananias, did not promise the erection of a new temple. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For other instances of Jesus using the first person when speaking on behalf of God, see Matt. 23:34, 37. See also below, n. 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Luke consciously avoided identifying Jesus as an agent of the destruction of the Temple, despite making it clear that he had announced the destruction of the Temple (Luke 21:6). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. This work, also known as the Coptic Gospel of Thomas, is a non-canonical Gospel, discovered near Nag Hammadi Egypt in 1945. It is composed of 114 “obscure sayings” attributed to Jesus, probably written in Greek (perhaps, a Syriac version was also published) in northern Mesopotamia (Edessa), in the late first to roughly the middle of the second century C.E. For details, see Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, 1987), 376-379. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. According to Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures*. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Assuming the originality of Jesus’ words about the future defilement of Jerusalem (“desolating sacrilege” [τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως]) in Mark 13:14, strongly influenced by the prophecies found in Daniel (9:27; 11;31; 12:11), Wassen believes that “like the Qumran sectarians, Jesus would have perceived the temple as defiled and expected a new perfect temple to take its place, and the priests were doomed to fail regardless of their conduct” (“The Use of the Dead Sea Scrolls,” 303). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. However, rather than expressing the self-awareness of the historical Jesus, the possibility cannot be excluded that the typological parallel between Jesus and Jeremiah was the result of a literary strategy adopted by Matthew. On this issue, see Mark F. Whitters, “Jesus in the Footsteps of Jeremiah,” *CBQ* 68/2 (2006), 229-247. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. On the paradoxical attitude of Jesus towards the Temple, see Adolfo D. Roitman, *Del Tabernáculo al Templo. Sobre el espacio sagrado en el judaísmo antiguo* (Estella [Navarra]: Editorial Verbo Divino, 2016), 250-253. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. On this book, see Naomi S. Jacobs, s.v. “Tobit, Book of,” *EDEJ*, 1314-1315. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. See also 13:16-18. Unless otherwise indicated, the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical literature is according to the online New Revised Standard w/Apocrypha version (<https://www.biblestudytools.com/apocrypha/nrsa/>). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. On this work, see Andrew D. Gross, s.v. “Temple Scroll (11QTemple),” in *EDEJ*, pp. 1291-1294; Adolfo D. Roitman, *Envisioning the Temple. Scrolls, Stones, and Symbols* (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 2003), 27-49. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. As an alternative reading, Ygael Yadin suggested “a day of blessing [ברכה]” (*The Temple Scroll*, Vol. 2 [Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society/The Institute of Archaeology of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem/The Shrine of the Book, 1983], 129). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Unless otherwise indicated, the Hebrew is according to Elisha Qimron, *The Dead Sea Scrolls – The Hebrew Writings*, 3 vols. (Jerusalem; Yad Ben-Zvi Press, 2010-2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. This correlation by the evangelist between the rebuilding of the Temple and the resurrection of Jesus was hinted at very subtly, when he put in the mouth of Jesus the words: “I will raise (ἐγερῶ) it up” (2:19), referring to the reconstruction of God’s House. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Dennis D. Sylva, “The Meaning and Function of Acts 7:46-50,” *JBL* 106-2 (1987), 270 n. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. J.P.M. Sweet, “A House Not Made With Hands,” in *Templum Amicitiae*: Essays on the Second Temple Presented to Ernest Bammel, ed. William Horbury (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 371. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Sweet, “A House Not Made With Hands,” 379. On the contrary, Parrin believes that there would have been no contradiction how Jesus or the early Christians understood the idea of ​​the “eschatological temple.” In his words, “Jesus was essentially claiming to be the temple, just as his followers were in another sense also the temple. Jesus as the temple and Jesus’ community as the temple: the two notions held together without contradiction; in fact, they required each other” (*Jesus the Temple*, 111). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. John P. Heil, “The Narrative Strategy and Pragmatics of the Temple Theme in Mark,” CBQ 59/1 (1997), 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Morna D. Hooker, “Traditions About the Temple in the Sayings of Jesus,” *BJRL* 70 (1988), 16 (italic original). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. On this work, see George J. Brooke, s.v. “Florilegium,” in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls,* eds. Larry H. Schiffman and James C. VanderKam (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1:297-298. Benjamin Wold, “Florilegium and Testimonia,” in *Early Jewish Literature. An Anthology*, eds. Brad Embry, Ronald Herms, and Archie T. Wright (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 1:501-504. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. On this issue, see Daniel R. Schwartz, “The Three Temples of 4 Q Florilegium,” *RQ* 10/1 (1979), 83-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Following Qimron’s reconstruction. Vermes has here “for them.” [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Qimron suggests (*The Dead Sea Scrolls*, vol. 2, 289) that an alternative word in the original text could have been יברא (create), in the same spirit of the wording in *Temple Scroll* XXIX, 9-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. That is to say: *1Enoch* 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Like *Midrash Vayosha* or *Seder Eliahu Rabba*. For details, see D. Flusser, “Two Notes on the Midrash on 2 Sam. vii,” *IEJ* 9/2 (1959), 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Flusser, “Two Notes,” 102-103. According to David N. Freedman, the words in Ex. 15:17 מִקְּדָשׁ אֲדֹנָי כּוֹנְנוּ יָדֶיךָ (“that your hands have established”) in their original literary setting referred to “the only true temple of God – made not by human but by divine hands – [that] is and can only be located on top of the mountain sacred to the god who dwells in that temple,” i.e. Mt. Sinai/Horeb (“Temple Without Hands,” in *Temples and High Places in Biblical* Times. Proceedings of the Colloquium in Honor of the Centennial of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. Jerusalem, 14-16 March 1977, ed. Avraham Biran [Jerusalem: The Nelson Glueck School of Biblical Archaeology of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1981], 21). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. On this term with negative meaning and its link with idolatry in Jewish intertestamental literature, see Philo, *Vita Mosis* II, 168; OrSib 3,604-606, 616-618, 722-723. On this word in the LXX, see below n. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. As in the case of the use of the first person when referring to the destruction of the Temple (see above), also on occasion of talking about the rebuilding of the Sanctuary, the historical Jesus would probably have referred to God as its builder, in total accordance with the idea prevalent in Jewish literature of the Second Temple (*1Enoch*, *Jubilees*, *Temple Scroll*, *4Q174*). Only after the destruction of the Second Temple in the year 70 CE do late Jewish texts begin referring to the Messiah as the builder of the eschatological Temple. An example of this new theological development is *Sibylline Oracles*: “And the city which God desired, this he [i.e., “a blessed man” = the Messiah] made more brilliant than stars and sun and moon, and he provided ornament and made a holy temple, exceedingly beautiful in its fair shrine…” (V, 420-423). See also *Targum of Zechariah* 4:7, 6:12; *Targum of Isaiah* 53:5; *Leviticus Rabbah* 9:6. On this issue, see Andrew Chester, “The Sibyl and the Temple,” in *Templum Amicitiae*: Essays on the Second Temple Presented to Ernst Bammel, ed. William Horbury (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 37-69, especially 52-53. As for a contrary opinion, assuming that this belief was already in existence in Second Temple Judaism, see Parrin, *Jesus the Temple*, 101-105. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. This word is not explicitly stated in the NT text. It is literally written: ἐν χειροποιήτοις. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. According to Taylor, “Stephen does not merely repudiate the conceptualization of temples as divine dwelling places, but in using the term χειροποίητος associates such institutions with idolatry (LXX Lev 26:1,10; Isa 2:18; 10:11; 16:12; Dan 5:4,23; 6:27; *Judith* 8:18; *Wis* 14:8.” (Nicholas H. Taylor, “Stephen, the Temple, and Early Christian Eschatology,” *RB* 110/1 [2003], 79). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Steve Moyise, “Jesus and Isaiah,” *Neotestamentica* 43/2 (2009), 268. Cf. 5:1-7; 6:9-10; 29:13; 53:1-2; 54:13; 56:7; 61:1-2. However, this author considers that “many of the explicit connections are most likely the work of the early church” (*ibid*.). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Sylva explains in a different way the relationship between Mark 14:58 and Acts 7:46-50. As he says, «I propose that Acts 7:46-50 is an answer to the temple accusation found in Mark 14:58 and partially referred to in Acts 6:14. According to Luke, the Christian message is not that Jesus will destroy the temple ‘made with hands’ (*cheiropoiēton,* Mark 14:58), but rather that God transcends (*ho hypsistos*, Acts 7:48) anything made with human hands (*cheiropoiētois*, Acts 7:48); the Christian message is not that Jesus will build another temple ‘not made with hands’ (*acheiropoiēton*, Mark 14:58), but rather that God’s hands made all things (*hē cheir mou epoiēsen tauta panta,* Acts 7:50). In such a way, Luke attempts to explain the false witness that Jesus would destroy the temple *cheiropoiēton* and build another *acheiropoiēton* as a misunderstanding of how these *cheiropoiēton* were used” (“The Meaning and Function of Acts,” 270-271). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. For details, see M. Henze, s.v. “Baruch, Second Book of,” *EDEJ*, 426-428. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Rivkah Nir, *The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Idea of Redemption in the Syriac Apocalypse of Baruch* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. For details, see Karina Martin Hogan, s.v. “Ezra, Fourth Book of,” *EDEJ*, 623-626. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. The English translation is according to Michael E. Stone, *Fourth Ezra* (Fortress Press; Minneapolis 1990). The Latin text is according to the Online Critical Pseudepigrapha (<https://pseudepigrapha.org/docs/text/4Ezra>). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)