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Metaphors and New Testament Theology: The Temple as a Test Case for a Theology of New Testament Metaphors

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Abstract: Researchers within New Testament Studies have attempted in recent years to articulate the multifaceted identity of a broad discipline. The place of New Testament Theology (NTT) remains disputed within the guild. Some would like to remove NTT from fields of research undertaken within Arts and Humanities departments, while others argue that the New Testament cannot be properly understood without an eye to its theological claims. This article employs the ongoing tension as a starting point from which to argue that metaphors provide a fruitful field of study within NTT. The study of metaphors allows readers of the New Testament to draw upon broader research within the Humanities, while wrestling with the theological claims of New Testament texts. The article outlines recent studies of metaphors in a range of fields before exploring metaphorical uses of temple imagery within the Gospel of John, the Pauline letters, and Revelation. Temple metaphors employ the same image with multiple referents so that the study of metaphors may also illustrate unity and diversity within the New Testament. The study of metaphors deserves further consideration within NTT, since multiple avenues for exploration open when undertaking such research.

Keywords: Gospel of John; metaphor; New Testament Theology; Pauline letters; revelation; temple



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1. Introduction

The discipline of New Testament Studies has struggled with issues of self-definition in recent decades. At first glance, the name suggests that the discipline centres around twenty-seven early Christian writings that have been collected into the corpus known today as the New Testament. Although such a statement is true, it has rarely been understood as an all-encompassing definition. Since the New Testament is a relatively small corpus of books, the borders of New Testament Studies regularly extend beyond these twenty-seven documents to include explorations of Israel's scriptures, other Second Temple Jewish writings, texts from Graeco-Roman philosophy, manuscripts of New Testament documents, and the reception of the New Testament in the second and third centuries. New Testament researchers are also asked to know something about the history and current state of their academic field. Reinhartz (2021) has challenged biblical scholars to be particularly attentive to the voices of marginalised scholars within the guild, while *Neutestamentler* like Bird (2009), Hengel (1994, 1996), Hurtado (1999, 2009), Meeks (2005), Schröter (2000), and Tuckett (2014) have set out the wide-ranging material that should be part of the discipline's identity, along with attempts to focus the discipline on particular types of studies.¹

In addition to enquiries into how far the borders of New Testament Studies should extend into studies of ancient history, religion, and archaeology, specialists in the New Testament have also disagreed about the scholarly orientation that should be brought to bear on these texts. Questions of orientation become particularly pointed when exploring New Testament Theology (NTT), that is, how the New Testament characterises God, how the individual documents therein may be interpreted as part of a collection, and what these ways of speaking reveal about early Christian belief structures. On the one hand, there are some who would declare that NTT is a subject of study and a genre of writing that is not

suitable within Arts and Humanities departments in modern universities. Such theological studies have value only within the confines of communities of believers. For example, Räsänen (2000, p. 166) warns against the dangers of allowing theological presuppositions to determine the study of historical texts. Such presuppositions may unduly affect historical study before it has begun. Rather, a sociologically oriented history of early Christianity should be put in its place.² More recently, Young (2020) has argued against what he sees as ‘protectionism’ within academic studies of the New Testament. He argues that the discipline of New Testament Studies tends to privilege the claims of the sources—in this case, the New Testament documents—rather than to interrogate them in a suitably critical manner. Such a claim has clear implications for the study of NTT, in which the theological claims and coherence of the New Testament are examined. In place of protectionism, Young calls instead for a reconsideration of the politics of New Testament scholarship with a particular view to issues of gender (see also Dye 2020). It may be difficult for those persuaded by the types of arguments made by Räsänen and Young to allow NTT a space within the public discourse of a pluralist society.

Others, however, have called for a renewed theological study of the New Testament.³ One of the most prominent ways in which such studies may be seen has come in the recent movement toward ‘theological interpretation of scripture’. Green (2007, p. 2) critiques modern biblical scholarship because it ‘has not oriented itself toward approaches or development of means that would enable us to tune our ears to the voice of God’. Such a programme of study would not entail abandoning historical readings of the New Testament, but would recognise that theological interpretation grows from a concern for both the historical situation out of which scripture was generated and the sociocultural conventions that are assumed within the texts (Green 2011b).⁴ To be sure, the movement that has come to be known as ‘theological interpretation of scripture’ does not allow for an infinite number of meanings within the biblical texts (Rae 2007). Rather, theological interpretation requires asking vital questions about how texts written for believers in Jesus Christ may reveal the identity of God (see similarly Campbell 2021). Interpreting scripture theologically has also been brought to bear on ecclesial practices that reflect on God’s actions in particular situations (Rae 2021). Thus, Peeler (2021) has explored the use of androcentric language in Hebrews with a view to how women take a place on God’s holy mountain within the masculine language of the letter. In a related vein, Rowe (2022) has urged *Neutestamentler* to consider the way in which truth claims in New Testament documents should inform the practice of New Testament Studies.

These two orientations toward theological study of the New Testament, namely, one in which theological readings are thought to be either impossible or inappropriate to the academy, and another in which theology is thought to be inseparably bound up within the texts now collected in the New Testament, have obvious implications for how one might approach NTT. For the first, such a study lies in the purview of ecclesial practitioners alone. Although there may be some in the second camp who also think that theological interpretations of scripture are exclusively bound up with inner-ecclesial matters, others would see such interpretations as part of an open enterprise in which theologically oriented readings of the New Testament are part of public discourse.

This article sets out from these tensions to consider how the study of metaphors might inform theological studies of the New Testament, remain part of a shared discourse available to all, and offer fresh material to consider when writing NTT. Although metaphors have received some attention by *Neutestamentler*, more remains to be done to situate examinations of metaphors within theological studies of the New Testament. Accordingly, the article briefly notes some of the ways in which metaphors appear in the New Testament, while also observing how these metaphors have been studied within New Testament Studies. The essay next turns its attention to the definition and effects of metaphor in order to situate itself within larger studies in the Humanities, and to suggest the importance of metaphorical language for epistemological and social formation. After modelling a theologically oriented study of temple metaphors in the Gospel of John, the Pauline letters, and Revelation, the

study concludes by reflecting on ways in which research on metaphors may inform NTT. Theological study of New Testament metaphors offers a promising way in which to explore how New Testament authors bring together ways of speaking that have social implications for readers of the text, while simultaneously articulating a robust theological understanding of God's relationship to the community.

Alongside the questions of self-definition and orientation that have already been noted, two additional observations from within the discipline of New Testament Studies also inform this article. First, recognition of both unity and diversity within the New Testament have become commonplace in recent decades. Within New Testament Studies, this language may be most closely associated with [Dunn \(1977\)](#), but studies of unity and diversity have proliferated (e.g., [Pitts 2008](#); [Skinner and Iverson 2012](#)). Importantly for our purposes, the language of unity and diversity extends even to theological studies of the New Testament (e.g., [Matera 2007](#); [Hahn 2011](#)). Considerations of the theological dimensions of metaphors will thus need to take into account both ways in which metaphors might cohere as a source of unity among New Testament documents, and ways in which metaphors are utilised to distinct ends by various authors. Second, *Neutestamentler* in recent years have become increasingly attentive to the ways in which New Testament texts and motifs were incorporated and interpreted by later authors. [Bockmuehl \(1995, 2006, pp. 169–228; 2010, 2012\)](#) has consistently brought the study of second and third century Christianity to bear on studies of the New Testament and figures therein. Other major edited collections have examined the Gospels and Paul (e.g., [Schröter et al. 2018](#); [Edsall 2019](#); [Schröter et al. 2019](#)). This list of studies could quickly be expanded. Yet the reason for mentioning it now is to note that theological studies of the New Testament may likewise be considered across a range of texts outside of the canon, thereby situating doctrinal elements within the history of early Christianity ([Menoud 1946](#), p. 152; [Butticaz 2019](#), p. 530). Insofar as early Christians utilised similar metaphors in their respective writings, theological explorations of metaphor may highlight similarities, contributions, and unique elements from the New Testament while also tracing the use of related metaphors outside the canonical New Testament.

2. Imagery and Metaphors in the New Testament

After locating this study in relation to several of the swirling eddies about how to study the New Testament, in general, and NTT in particular, it will be useful to say something about the various ways in which metaphors are encountered within the canonical collection. The documents gathered in the New Testament are filled with images. Jesus's parables are a particularly vibrant source of imagery that draw on the full range of first-century Galilean life and which 'open imagistic worlds that compel thought' ([Snodgrass 2018](#), p. 602). One meets a man spreading seed on a piece of land with varying qualities of soil. Jesus interprets this scene with a view to how people will receive the message about the kingdom of God (Matthew 13:1–23; Mark 4:1–20; Luke 8:4–15).⁵ Jesus also imbues the ordinary *realia* around him with greater meaning than is evident at first sight. When talking with a woman at a well, Jesus identifies himself as living water that will forever take away any thirst (John 4:1–42). Similes are also a part of Jesus's teaching in the Gospels. The kingdom of God—or the kingdom of heaven in Matthew—is compared to a seed that grows on its own (Mark 4:26–29), a grain of mustard (Matthew 13:31–32; Mark 4:30–32; Luke 13:18–19), a bit of yeast baked into some bread (Matthew 13:33; Luke 13:20–21), and a net cast into the sea (Matthew 13:47–50). Various types of rhetorical images pervade the New Testament Gospels.

Other images are utilised to reveal something about God. This happens in the parables as God is depicted as a king ruling mercifully over subjects (Matthew 18:23–35) or a master intervening following the misbehaviour of slaves or tenants (Matthew 21:33–46; Mark 12:1–12; Luke 7:40–43; 20:9–19). Yet imagery related to God extends beyond the parables. God is depicted as a king on the throne (1 Timothy 6:15; Hebrews 4:16; Revelation 4:2–5; 15:3). One of the most enduring images of God in Christian theology draws upon New Testament portrayals of God as Father (Luke 10:21–22; John 5:17–18; Romans 1:7; 8:15;

James 1:17). Paternal language expands to include Jesus as God's Son (Matthew 16:16; Acts 9:20; Galatians 4:4–6; 1 John 4:15). Although allusions to the Father and Son would likely have had other cultural overtones among first-century readers, including interactions with references to divine fathers and sons in Jewish scripture and among Roman emperors, the New Testament utilises these metaphors in their own way in order to reveal God's identity in a coherent and persuasive manner. Jesus is likewise portrayed as a lamb (John 1:29, 36; Revelation 5:6; 7:17; 19:9), a lion (Revelation 5:5), and a star (Revelation 22:16). Among other images, his death is described in terms of a sacrifice (1 Corinthians 5:7–8; Hebrews 9:26–28; 1 John 2:2) and an exodus (Luke 9:31; [Mittmann 2021](#)). Symbolic representations of the divine are found throughout the New Testament and are thus vital to NTT.

Such imagery can speak to the close connections between God and God's people, particularly when considered across the New Testament canon. If God is king, then God's people are ruled over by God (Mark 1:14–15; Acts 8:12; Ephesians 2:4–7; Revelation 1:4–6). The kingdom of God is thus a benevolent realm in which wrongs are set right and the last are made first (Matthew 19:30; Mark 10:31; Luke 13:30; 16:9–31). If God is Father and Jesus is Son, then the people are adopted graciously as heirs of God (Romans 8:15–23; Galatians 4:4–6; [Zimmermann 2007](#), pp. 127–40; [Heim 2017a](#)). If Jesus's death is sacrificial, then his actions on behalf of God's people take away their sins (John 1:29, 36; Hebrews 10:10; 1 John 2:2). When one reads the entire New Testament, it is not only the number of images that come to the fore but also the potential for interaction in the imagery. An intriguing example of this can be found in the use of temple language throughout the New Testament. Although the temple in Jerusalem and the practices associated with it have an ambivalent place within many of the documents contained in the New Testament, cultic imagery is put to a variety of uses by New Testament authors. Temple metaphors will thus provide a useful place from which to illustrate the utility of metaphorical studies for theological readings of the New Testament.

The collection of documents in the New Testament is thus filled with images that appear for a variety of purposes. This section has merely pointed to the existence of such images and has risked collapsing various imagery and figures of speech in doing so. In order to gain greater clarity about the promise of metaphors for NTT, it will be helpful to reflect at greater length on precisely what a metaphor is.

3. Recent Scholarship on Metaphors

Metaphors are not only littered across the pages of the New Testament but are also prevalent—almost omnipresent—throughout language, rhetoric, and literature. When someone mentions a mouse, they draw upon a metaphorical usage of the Latin word *musculus*, a little mouse. The fleshy matter described as a mouse is implicitly compared to a small rodent. Likewise, when someone declares that they are 'feeling down', they utilise an orientation metaphor that relates downward movement with negative states ([Lakoff and Johnson 2003](#), pp. 15–16; [Kövecses 2010](#), p. 40). As metaphors pervade language, so also studies of metaphor continue to proliferate. Given that the focus of the study is on the ways in which metaphors may be useful to the discipline of NTT, it will thus be useful to situate this study within the context of recent studies of metaphor.⁶

Identifying precisely what a metaphor is and articulating how human beings form metaphors have proven to be tricky tasks. This essay will focus on linguistic and rhetorical understandings of metaphor rather than attempts to locate the origins of a metaphor externally or within embodied cognition ([Heim 2017a](#), pp. 52–56). [Soskice's \(1985\)](#) influential definition of metaphor can be usefully adopted for the purposes of this paper. For Soskice, 'metaphor is that figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another' ([Soskice 1985](#), p. 15).⁷ A metaphor is thus found when two matters animate one another. The author or speaker of a metaphor utilises certain elements of one item to shed light on a topic which, at first glance, may have no particular relation to the former. Thus, both Paul and the author of 1 Clement use the body to speak about a collective of people (1 Cor 12:12–31; 1 Clem. 37.5–38.1). The audiences that each author

addresses are described in terms of a body. Both authors highlight unity and diversity within the body, but the metaphors may be designed to accomplish different tasks in their respective texts. Metaphors are rhetorically useful because they enable authors to enhance an audience's understanding of the topic that they desire to address by bringing another, perhaps better-known, object into the conversation. In this example, the people of God can be understood in terms of a body. Just as a body is a singular unit that can be conceptually divided into distinct parts that must cooperate, so also the Corinthian communities addressed in 1 Corinthians and 1 Clement are to be united communities comprised of cooperating individuals.

The interaction that results from a metaphor can bring about new knowledge, introduce a fresh concept, enable one to formulate an innovative way of thinking, and encourage the audience to participate in the meaning-making process.⁸ Metaphors encourage such conceptual newness because they are catachrestic (Soskice 1985, pp. 58–64). To speak metaphorically requires a speaker to utilise at least one term in a way that differs from its normal usage (Kennedy 2008, p. 449). In a good metaphor, however, this catachresis bears fruitful results. Far from being dissonant, the potential misuse brings about new possibilities of meaning. Metaphors are thus not simply pedagogically useful but are irreducible (Soskice 1985, pp. 93–96; Johnson 2008, p. 39).⁹ Although similar phrases may be found, it is unlikely that a completely synonymous word exists in English that equates with the phrase 'falling in love'. 'Falling in love' is an irreducible, albeit somewhat common, metaphorical phrase in English (Kennedy 2008, p. 449). Although metaphors may sometimes be approximated by further exploration or additional figures of speech, something is lost in the process of translation. More specifically, the potential of metaphors to be extended dissipates when metaphors are explained in alternative ways.

Metaphors regularly create lexical gaps that need to be filled with additional terminology. To speak of a brain in terms of a computer allows one to extend the computer metaphor to speak of a brain's storage capacities, of the size of a brain's databank, of the possibility of being programmed in alternative ways, and of the myriad means by which a brain gives feedback. There is little inherent in the brain that necessitates its comparison to a databank, but this comparison becomes natural when a brain is conceived of in terms of a computer. Similarly, when electrical energy is discussed in terms of currents, the speaker depicts electrical energy in similar ways to the currents that run through water (Soskice 1985, p. 94). By extension, it is possible to speak of a direction in which electricity flows, to stop the direction of this flow, and to reroute the electricity in another direction. Metaphors are thus central to conceptualisation and the epistemological process (Kim 2021). They can thus be formed by the author to accomplish a myriad of tasks because they create such lexical gaps. Moreover, metaphors act on their audience in ways that may be difficult for an author to anticipate. The transmission of metaphors and their significance can thus be a fluid process.

The linguistic and rhetorical aspects of metaphor are central to this study, but they are hardly the only ways in which the studies of metaphor have been undertaken and contributed to recent scholarly discussions. Metaphors have played a vital role in philosophy and theology, particularly in the philosophy of science and Thomistic theology (Lakoff and Johnson 1999; Johnson 2008; Ryliškyté 2017). By speaking metaphorically, one can reframe, alter, or introduce new concepts to an audience. In so doing, one has the power to modify the cognitive processes at work in an audience. Put differently, 'metaphors have the power to create a new reality' (Lakoff and Johnson 2003, p. 145). Metaphors are also capable of influencing group identity (Heim 2017a, pp. 104–10). When constructing a metaphor, an author can frame the metaphor in such a way as to create an in-group and an out-group so that the boundaries of a group are maintained. In addition, some metaphors can be privileged in such a way as to become constitutive of a group's identity (Zhang 2011). The metaphor becomes the primary way by which the group understands who it is, what has happened to it, and what they are doing. Finally, since metaphors depend in large part on being embodied, they can be useful in defining embodied entities that are located in space.

Even a metaphor that may at first glance have nothing to do with anything external to a person, such as ‘feeling down’, often depends upon an understanding of embodied reality. For example, if someone says they are ‘feeling down’, the direction word *down* makes sense only if one is in space within a body.¹⁰ A disembodied being would be unlikely to experience up and down in the same way.

If metaphors are irreducible linguistic constructions with the power to frame how individuals conceptualise and how groups outline their identity, then the study of metaphors in historical and/or theological texts is not merely the exploration of rhetorical adornments. Rather, investigating what metaphors mean and how they are utilised in a text may open new vistas from which to gaze upon the people, beliefs, and literature of a group (Zimmermann 2003b, pp. 6–18). By exploring the theological uses to which metaphors were put in the New Testament, researchers may endeavour not only to come to a better understanding of the texts in which the metaphors are located, but also to recognise the way in which metaphors, doctrines, and beliefs interact with one another.

4. New Testament Temple Metaphors

Metaphorical discussions of the temple provide an exemplary test case to study within the pages of this article. The temple played a central role in forming Jewish identity during the Second Temple period, and its destruction in 70 CE left traumatic scars that are evident in extant Jewish literature. The temple continued to be central in the writings of Jesus followers after the death and resurrection of Jesus. There are hints of continued temple practice among those who followed Jesus (e.g., Acts 2:46; 3:1; 5:42), but the temple’s largest impact on early Christians is to be found in its continued presence in the discourse of believers. Although the discussion of temple metaphors could be expanded to include texts like Hebrews (Church 2017), 1 Peter (Botner 2020), or Luke–Acts (Smith 2017; Moore 2022), this section will focus its attention on the Gospel of John, the Pauline letters, and Revelation in order to use these texts as a foundation for methodological reflection in the next section.

4.1. The Gospel of John

For anyone coming to the Gospel of John after reading the accounts of Jesus’s actions in the temple in the Synoptic Gospels, the elevated portrayal of the Johannine Jesus coincides with a startling account of Jesus’s actions in the temple. Although Matthew, Mark, and Luke locate Jesus’s actions in the temple near the end of their stories (Matthew 21:12–16; Mark 12:15–18; Luke 19:45–48), John’s account is placed prominently near the beginning of Jesus’s ministry (John 2:13–22; Anderson 2008, p. 99). The differing levels of violence between the accounts is also a noteworthy point (Croy 2009; Glancy 2009). A less obvious but no less significant difference between John and the Synoptics is the scriptural rationale attributed to Jesus’s action. Jesus quotes Isaiah 56:7 and alludes to Jeremiah 7:11 to justify his actions in the Synoptics (Matthew 21:13; Mark 11:17; Luke 19:46). The Johannine Jesus says something similar to the Synoptic accounts when he tells the temple merchants to leave and ‘not make my Father’s house a market house’ (John 2:16). Yet Jesus does not appeal directly to scripture in the Johannine story. Rather, the disciples remembered the scriptural text through which the story is to be interpreted. They recall the Psalmist’s claim that ‘zeal for your house will consume me’ (Ps 68:10 [LXX]; John 2:17).

Although questions about the historical Jesus’s actions in the temple (Fredriksen 2007; 2018, pp. 43–51; Hengel and Schwemer 2007, pp. 557–61; 2019, pp. 589–93) and the literary function of the temple incident in each Gospel (Vistar 2018) are centrally important subjects to consider, the interest of this study lies on the relationship between the scriptural basis remembered by the disciples, and the metaphorical rationale given by Jesus in the immediate aftermath of the temple incident. Jesus’s interpretation of the event is distinct from the disciples’ scriptural recollection in John 2:17. Jesus’s words are drawn from him by a question from ‘the Jews’, who enquire about the sign that he can produce to justify the profaning disturbance which he has caused (John 2:18). Jesus’s response is stunning. If the temple is destroyed, he will rebuild it in three days (John 2:19). His Jewish interlocutors

scoff at such a claim because the Herodian temple had been under construction for forty-six years (John 2:20; see also Josephus, *Antiquitates Iudaicae* 15.11.1–7 [380–425]). Jesus's claim seems incredible. However, the narrator clarifies in an interpretive aside, that Jesus was talking about 'the temple of his body' (John 2:21). Although Jesus's actions in the temple in John 2:14–16 have implications for how Jesus and his followers see the temple, Jesus's Jewish dialogue partners fail to understand his explanation because they do not recognise that Jesus has defined the temple in terms of himself. Indeed, the disciples apparently fail to understand Jesus's words and only recognise their significance after the resurrection.

This failure on the part of the disciples to understand suggests that there are statements in John's Gospel that are only properly appreciated from a post-resurrection perspective (Hengel 1990, p. 29; Ashton 2014, pp. 33–36; Frey 2020, pp. 212–13).¹¹ Although the disciples may only have understood after the resurrection, placing Jesus's identification of his body as the temple early in the narrative enables readers to recognise the significance of the passion events from the beginning. For Johannine readers, God does not dwell uniquely in the Jerusalem temple. Rather, God has revealed Godself in the temple of Jesus's body. Jesus's body is thus the revelation of God's glory on earth. 'Jesus' promise of a new temple suggests that God's glory would be manifested, not in a building, but in a person' (Koester 2003, p. 88).¹² Jesus's identification as the temple is then located more precisely in John 2:22. The references to a three-day time frame in John 2:19–20 might hint at the forthcoming—from a narrative perspective—event of Jesus's resurrection for John's readers. The disciples' remembrance of Jesus's words 'when he was raised from the dead' (John 2:22) brings these hints clearly into the light. When Jesus speaks about the reconstruction of the temple, he describes the resurrection of his body as the reestablishment of God's temple.

When the disciples recognise the significance of Jesus's saying, they believe both scripture and the word that Jesus spoke (John 2:22). Both scripture and a word of Jesus have already been discussed in John 2:13–22. The narrator's statement in John 2:22 does not mean that the disciples believe in scripture generally, but that the disciples understood the connection between Ps 68:10 and Jesus's temple actions. Similarly, their belief in Jesus's word refers to his self-identification as the temple (Beasley-Murray 1987, p. 41). The citation of Ps 68:10 may be interpreted with a view to the zeal that Jesus exhibits in clearing the temple. Such an interpretation may be aided by noting that Ps 68:9 refers to estrangement between brothers. Jesus's actions in John 2:14–16 not only illustrate his zeal but also create separation between the Jewish authorities and him (Brown 1966, pp. 123–24). Yet the consumption of Jesus prefigures the death on the cross that is so prominent throughout the Johannine narrative (Klaiber 2017, pp. 78–79). Both meanings of the verse may be in view within John's story (Zumstein 2017, p. 127), but the latter interpretation is given greater prominence both in the temple pericope (John 2:18–22) and in the remainder of the story with regard to the disciples' memory (John 11:13; 12:16; 13:7). By citing Ps 68:10 and the future consumption of Jesus's body, the narrator prepares readers for the crucifixion of Jesus's body. The crucifixion comes about as a result of Jesus's zeal and makes it possible for the temple to be rebuilt, that is, resurrected, after three days.¹³

The messianic links between Jesus and the temple have implications for how readers consider Jesus's identity elsewhere in the Gospel of John. Temple connotations may already be found in the prologue as the narrator declares that the Word 'dwelt among us' (ἐσκήνωσεν ἐν ἡμῖν). Accordingly, the author is positioned among those who have seen the Word's glory, which is further characterised as the glory of the only begotten of the Father (John 1:14). The language of dwelling and glory recalls the tabernacle in which God's glory was made visible to Moses and the Hebrew people journeying in the wilderness. Other Second Temple authors link the tabernacle and temple, and it is likely that Jesus's association with both tabernacle and temple are meant to work together in John's story (Behr 2019, pp. 139–40). A similar phenomenon may be found in Jesus's promise that Nathanael would see angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man (John 1:51). Jesus's language is redolent of Jacob's experience at Bethel, so that Jesus is again depicted as a location in which God's presence is revealed to human beings. When talking to the

Samaritan woman (John 4:1–42), Jesus’s discussion of worship works in concert with his earlier temple metaphor. The Samaritan woman enquires about the proper location of worship, whether it is on Mount Gerizim or in Jerusalem (John 4:20). Jesus explains that an hour is coming when God’s people will worship in neither place (John 4:21) but rather in spirit and truth (John 4:23–24). Just as Jesus is associated with the temple, so he has the right to declare the way in which people are called to worship the Father. The temple metaphor likewise interacts with other images that Jesus employs in his self-identifications. When Jesus refers to himself as the source of living water (John 7:37–39), the Johannine image resonates with depictions of the heavenly temple in Israel’s scriptures from which living waters flow (e.g., Ezek. 47:1–12; Joel 4:18 [LXX]). Yet Jesus’s description of raising the temple in three days (John 2:19) is most closely associated with his death and resurrection. The passion is the event in which Jesus is decisively glorified (John 12:16), and temple, glorification, and exaltation themes converge in Jesus’s death and resurrection (Hoskins 2006, pp. 147–59).

The Johannine Jesus thus speaks of himself metaphorically in terms of a temple. Such a statement identifies Jesus in particular ways. Jesus’s body is understood as the temple that is destroyed and rebuilt in three days, so that the events of the passion are already alluded to in John 2:13–22. This knowledge only becomes available to the disciples after Jesus’s death and resurrection (Zimmermann 2003a, p. 110). Even so, the influence of christologically interpreted temple themes can be found elsewhere in John’s story. Instead of a temple in Jerusalem, God’s self-revelation is thus to be found in the temple that is Jesus himself.

4.2. The Pauline Letters

Turning from John to Paul is a canonical move forward but a chronological move backward. Although both authors are similar in their high view of who Jesus is, and in their willingness to employ temple language metaphorically, the use to which Paul puts his temple metaphors in the middle of the first century differs substantially from John’s metaphorical portrayals of Jesus as temple. Paul, on the other hand, speaks of the community of believers in terms of a temple. The temple metaphors are one form of cultic imagery that informs how Paul desires his addressees to live, worship, and interact with others in the world (Gupta 2010). Although Paul’s depictions of communities in terms of a temple have vital implications for how the faithful should relate to one another, the presence of Jesus and the consequences for how one associates with outsiders remain important to consider when reading Paul.

Paul’s temple metaphors occur most often within the Corinthian correspondence. Paul refers to the Corinthians with reference to a temple three times within the letters to Corinth, and he emphasises both unity and holiness in doing so. The first occurrence of the metaphor is found in the lengthy opening section of 1 Corinthians (1 Cor 1:10–4:21). Paul is alarmed at the presence of internal factionalism among Corinthian believers (Mitchell 1991), and he writes to correct their emphasis on what he considers a mistaken kind of wisdom. Paul and at least some of the Corinthians appear to be at odds regarding the nature of wisdom and the way in which God’s mysteries have been revealed. These misunderstandings regarding the nature of revelation may involve disagreements about teaching authorities (Mihailă 2019). In any case, they seem to lie at the heart of the divisions that Paul has discovered through Chloe’s associates (1 Cor 1:10–17). Near the centre of this discourse, Paul employs three images to identify the Corinthians: a field, a building, and a temple. Human teachers are ultimately of little account in the Corinthian field because God must give the water by which they grow (1 Cor 3:5–8). In a society in which funding construction was an important activity of magistrates and other civic leaders, Paul and other teachers are thus called to work carefully to build on the foundation of the Corinthian building (Morgan 2020, pp. 174–81). Jesus alone is the foundation, and the work that other architects construct on the foundation will eventually be tested to determine its substance and quality (1 Cor 3:9–15).

Paul's reference to the temple in 1 Cor 3:16–17 is thus part of a larger discourse calling for unity among Corinthian believers. The Corinthians are collectively portrayed as a single temple so that the temple metaphor is a way of expressing the identity of the Corinthian community (Thiselton 2000, pp. 315–16). Divisions are inappropriate within a community that has been chosen by God like a temple. Moreover, if the Corinthian believers collectively form a temple, then holiness is required within the community. Paul's erotesis asks readers to consider their identity more carefully. They are God's temple, and God's Spirit thus indwells them (1 Cor 3:16). An implication follows from the identification of the Corinthians as a temple, namely, that if someone ruins the temple, God will ruin that person. The rationale behind Paul's claim is that God's temple is holy (ἅγιος), so the Corinthians are likewise sacred (1 Cor 3:17; Fitzmyer 2008, p. 203). If they are holy and are corrupted by someone, Paul reasons that there will be consequences for the source of the corruption. The temple metaphor is thus a call to communal holiness. Yet the Pauline image is not simply part of a call to action. It is also a reminder of the Corinthian identity. They are not called to become God's temple; rather, they are God's temple. This recognition of how the imagery of 1 Cor 3:16–17 works together recalls Paul's initial address to Corinthian believers, who are referred to as 'sanctified' (ἡγιασμένοις) in Christ Jesus and 'called saints' (κλητοῖς ἁγίοις; 1 Cor 1:2). Despite the shortcomings that Paul finds in the Corinthian community, his temple imagery beckons them to recall who they already are in Jesus.

Paul employs temple imagery to describe the Corinthians later in the letter when he takes up the matter of prostitution. Corinthian believers are not only restricted from having sexual relations with others' partners but also from visiting prostitutes. Paul's instructions are at odds with the general tenor of Roman legal attitudes, which largely tolerated prostitution as a form of licit sexual activity (McGinn 1998, pp. 343–45; 2004, pp. 261–62). In so doing, Paul holds male believers to the same sexual standards that were idealised for women (Hurtado 2016, pp. 160–65). The application of the temple metaphor to individuals provides the rationale for Paul's ethical statement. Illicit sexual relations are incompatible with the identification of Corinthian believers as temples in which the Holy Spirit dwells. Moreover, Paul identifies the Corinthian body as the temple. Although it is tempting to understand the reference to a singular body and temple as collective nouns in keeping with 1 Cor 3:16–17, the context of 1 Cor 6:12–20 strongly suggests that the identities and corresponding sexual ethics of individuals are in view (Campbell 2008, p. 185). Corinthian bodies are thus holy sites in which the Holy Spirit is present (Marshall 2015, pp. 843–44). Therefore, the bodies must be kept from defilement (Blidstein 2017, p. 152). A similar call to a particular kind of lifestyle underlies Paul's temple metaphor in another Corinthian letter. He urges the Corinthians 'not to be unequally yoked' (μὴ γίνεσθε ἑτεροζυγοῦντες) with unbelievers (2 Cor 6:14). The rationale that follows depends on oppositions between righteousness and lawlessness, light and darkness, and the true God and idols. Paul again poses a question with an ostensibly obvious answer regarding the possibility of agreement between God's temple and idols (2 Cor 6:16). For Paul, there is no chance for God and idols to call a truce. Paul then insists that he and the Corinthians are collectively the temple of the living God. As in 1 Cor 3:16–17, a collective reference comes into view with the temple metaphor of 2 Corinthians. Yet the emphasis falls heavily on a holy lifestyle. Believers should not be inequitably yoked with unbelievers because God dwells, walks, and is in a covenant relationship with them (Morgan 2020, p. 106). In short, the Corinthians are identified as God's people (2 Cor 6:16). Accordingly, Paul employs scriptural language to call the Corinthians to come out and to be set apart in their lifestyle (2 Cor 6:17–18). By following Paul's instructions, the Corinthians will purify themselves and complete their sanctification (2 Cor 7:1). The Pauline temple metaphor is employed to call the Corinthians to live holy lifestyles because they are already like the temple, insofar as God is present in their community and in their bodies.

The final temple metaphor to discuss within the Pauline corpus comes from Ephesians and highlights the importance of unity within the people of God.¹⁴ Unity is a central theme in the letter as Paul highlights by enumerating several singular entities around which the

audience should unify (Eph 4:3–6). Paul emphasises the social and ethnic implications of the unity that results from the Christ event in Eph 2:11–22 and appeals to temple language in the process. Although Paul’s audience was once far from God and estranged from Israel as gentiles, they have been brought near to God’s people through Christ’s blood (Eph 2:11–13).¹⁵ Jesus is thus an icon of peace in the passage (Eph 2:14, 17). He tore down the wall that was erected to divide the community and thus created a new human being (Eph 2:14–16; Thielman 2010, pp. 163–73). Paul and the Ephesians thus have access to the Father in the Spirit (Eph 2:18). Paul’s reference to the Spirit and the resulting access to the Father open the Ephesian temple metaphor, while simultaneously resonating with 1 Cor 3:16–17. The Ephesians are being built up on the foundation of the apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20). The construction of the Ephesians on a foundation again recalls Paul’s Corinthian metaphors, particularly the building metaphor in which Jesus serves as the foundation (1 Cor 3:11; see further Van Nes 2015). Jesus’s position has moved in the Ephesian temple metaphor. He is no longer the entire foundation but more specifically the cornerstone (ἄκρογωνιᾶς; Eph 2:20). The entire building is joined together in Jesus and grows into a holy temple (Eph 2:21). The indwelling of the Spirit in the Ephesians thereby becomes a sign of the unity that results from Jesus’s redemptive work on behalf of the audience. Life in Jesus should thus be characterised by concord rather than separation.

Paul employs the temple metaphors for varying purposes within his letters. At times, he emphasises the unity that should typify the communal life of his addressees. Elsewhere, the weight of Paul’s metaphor falls on the holiness that believers should portray in their relationships with one another and with others. In all cases, however, Paul’s temple imagery is applied to the community. The formation of God’s people into a temple is a result of what Jesus has done, but Jesus is not himself the temple. Rather, believers are portrayed as a temple in ways that enable Paul to enshrine the unity and holiness that he desires from his audiences into the identity of the communities.

4.3. *The Revelation of John*

The final text to examine in this article is the Revelation of John. Temple imagery pervades the Apocalypse in a stunning variety of ways.¹⁶ Sacred objects from within the temple are mentioned throughout the text. For example, John’s first vision of Jesus occurs among seven golden lampstands (Rev 1:12–13). In addition to the inclusion of lampstands within the Jewish temple (1 Kings 7:49; 2 Chronicles 4:7, 20; see also Exodus 25:31–40), the lampstands are interpreted within the Apocalypse as the seven churches of Asia to which the text is addressed (Rev 1:20). The two witnesses who prophesy for 1260 days are likewise described as the two lampstands who are placed before the Lord (Rev 11:4). The altar and incense are associated with the prayers of God’s people (Rev 6:9–11; 8:3–4). Yet the altar also appears to be capable of declaring its praise of God with its own agency (Rev 16:7). The ark of the covenant likewise makes an appearance in John’s apocalyptic vision (Rev 11:19). Temple furnishings are flexible images that can be multivalent within the text. The plasticity of images in Revelation enables the author to incorporate them in such manifold ways (Huber 2020).

The variety of ways in which temple artefacts and related cultic imagery are used makes it difficult to classify the temple strictly as a metaphor in Revelation. The Jerusalem temple may be in view when the two witnesses are discussed in Rev 11:1–14, even if the event described therein is not understood as a direct prophecy of some future event. In an allusion to the end of Ezekiel’s prophecy, John receives a measuring rod with which to measure the temple (Rev 11:1; see Ezekiel 40:3, 5). He hears about the defilement of the temple’s outer courts (Rev 11:2), finds that the temple is located in Jerusalem (Rev 11:8), and sees people on earth celebrating the deaths of the prophets (Rev 11:9–10). Like the rest of the New Testament Apocalypse, this passage is also redolent with symbolism. Yet the temple is not strictly speaking a metaphor in Rev 11:1–14. Although both the temple and the items associated with it are highly symbolic, rhetoric about the temple is not always an exclusively figurative mode of communication in Revelation. Nevertheless, the symbolic

significance of the language makes it a useful point of comparison with the Gospel of John and the letters of Paul. Since the temple is only occasionally a physical temple located on earth, it is worth exploring the temple's symbolic significance in further detail.

When Jesus initially appears to John in exile, the setting in which John sees him resounds with temple imagery. The temple is thus a key theme from the start of the Apocalypse. John sees seven lampstands that mark out his experience as an occurrence happening within a sort of visualised sanctuary on Patmos (Rev 1:12; Briggs 1999, pp. 53–54). The description of the person in the centre of the temple is astonishing. Employing language from the apocalyptic portion of Daniel, John sees one like a son of man standing among the lampstands (Rev 1:13; see Dan 7:13–14; Berger 2018, pp. 175–79). In addition to the seven lampstands in which the son of man appears, John also sees seven stars in the man's right hand (Rev 1:16). The significance of the lampstands and stars are then interpreted symbolically by the son of man himself. The seven stars signify the seven churches to which John has been told to write, while the seven lampstands identify seven angels who watch over the seven communities of believers (Rev 1:20). The interplay between temple and astral imagery creates a paradoxical tension between heaven and earth that remains in play throughout the Apocalypse, while the identification of both the lampstands and the stars in terms of the addressees keeps the focus in Rev 1:9–20 on the way in which seven particular earthly communities are to understand their lives within God's apocalyptic activities.

The most common ways in which the temple is found in Revelation concern references to God's heavenly abode in terms of a temple. The heavenly temple is a common feature of Second Temple apocalyptic literature (e.g., 1 Enoch 14.16–20; Testament of Levi 5.1; 18.6). Revelation employs the temple to illustrate God's majesty and holiness. Because God resides in the heavenly temple, God is worthy of worship and set apart from everything else that happens in creation. The beast that comes from the sea thus blasphemes God's tent (σκηνήν), that is, God's tabernacle (Rev 13:6). The beast is part of the creation that opposes God and God's people, and the slander of God's dwelling place is one of the characteristics that clarifies the beast's anti-God position. The close connection between the tabernacle and testimony is so strong that John can refer to the opening of the tabernacle (Rev 15:5) and then refer in the same breath to God's power filling the temple (Rev 15:5, 8; Koester 2018, pp. 144–45). To understand the heavenly tabernacle and the temple in nearly identical terms is thus justified by John's use of the terms within Revelation. Both entities signify God's presence. It is thus appropriate to worship God in the temple, and the heavenly temple is a realm in which God's praises are sung. After witnesses are gathered from the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev 7:1–8), John sees an innumerable crowd singing of God's salvation, wisdom, power, and honour (Rev 7:9–12). One of the elders then explains to John that those who wear white robes while bearing witness to God's strength came from the affliction of believers, and currently serve before the throne in God's heavenly temple (Rev 7:13–17; see also Rev 6:9–11). The Lamb in the midst of the throne will serve as their shepherd so that their service will occur without any further suffering. The temple is thus both a place of worship and a place of refuge for those who have suffered on earth.

The link between throne and temple is also found in the stunning vision of Rev 4–5. Central to the purpose of John's vision is the revelation of the Lamb's identity as Jesus the crucified messiah (Rev 5:6). Yet the location in which the Lamb is revealed is important to observe. John enters the temple through an open door in heaven (Rev 4:1). A throne stands at the centre of the temple. Although the throne is occupied by someone who is beyond detailed description (Rowland 1999, p. 793), the splendour of the throne and its surroundings denote the majesty of its occupant (Rev 4:2–6). In addition to the visual grandeur of the heavenly temple, praises ring out endlessly concerning God's holiness, glory, and power in creation (Rev 4:8, 11). Whatever disturbances occur on earth, the heavenly temple is thus a place in which to worship God. The presence and role of the Lamb are more surprising when Revelation is read alongside other apocalyptic literature (Karrer 2003, p. 123). The Lamb not only opens the scroll and thus plays a role in the apocalyptic drama (Rev 5:7; 6:1) but is also acclaimed by the same creatures that praise

God. The Lamb is worthy to open the scroll because he was slain, should receive power, wealth, and praise, and joins the one who sits on the throne as one whose glory should be given eternally (Rev 5:9–13). Both the one on the throne and the Lamb are worshipped in the heavenly temple. Since the worship given to the Lamb is of the same kind that is given to the one who sits on the throne, the Lamb must be regarded as divine and identified with the God who created all things (Bauckham 1993; Hurtado 2003, pp. 591–93).

Since the heavenly temple is the centralised location of God's presence within Revelation, it must be kept pure for the worship of God. The story throughout much of the Apocalypse continues from this central premise. Although the heavenly temple is a cultically pure space in which to worship, the earth that God created is notably not in such a clean state. God's judgement is intended, among other things, to purify creation of all that opposes God. When the seventh trumpet is sounded (Rev 11:15), God's temple is opened amidst a rash of praises from heavenly voices (Rev 11:19). The opening of the temple is followed by lightning, thunder, and a great hailstorm. The temple is most prominent in the judgements of Rev 14–16. Before 'one like the son of man' swings his sickle to harvest the earth, an angel comes out of the temple to inform him that it is time to begin (Rev 14:15). Immediately afterward, another angel emerges from the temple with a sickle, while a third angel instructs the angel with the sickle to harvest grapes in the winepress of God's wrath (Rev 14:17–20). The temple is thus the location from which commands are given about judgement. The bowl judgements begin with a temple procession of seven angels, while one of the living creatures bestows each of them with a bowl (Rev 15:5–8; Ladd 1972, pp. 206–8). A voice then comes from the temple with the instruction to begin pouring the bowls out on the earth (Rev 16:1). Although such actions cause difficulty for all the inhabitants of the earth, the judgements are ultimately designed to wipe away the forces that oppose God. Their origin within the heavenly temple signifies the justice and truth that God exercises as judge.

The last vision of the temple is one of the most delightful surprises in the narrative arc of Revelation. The end of the story portrays the descent of a new Jerusalem in which God will dwell with the people of God (Rev 21:1–22:6; Beale 2004, pp. 328–31). There is a renewal and reimagining of both heaven and earth throughout this passage. The new Jerusalem becomes a place in which tears, death, and mourning no longer have a place (Rev 21:4). The city is depicted in a variety of ways, and there is a particularly close connection between the city and feminine imagery (Rev 21:1–2, 9; Fekkes 1990; Huber 2013, pp. 82–83). Jerusalem is imagined coming down from heaven in ways that recall the heavenly temple of Rev 4–5 (Rev 21:10–14). The city shines brilliantly due to the presence of God's glory, while the gates of the city are numbered and placed in symbolic locations. The cubed shape of the city is striking (Rev 21:16), but one of the most notable claims about this new city is that there is no temple within its walls (Rev 21:22). The rationale that underlies this claim is that God and the Lamb indwell the entirety of the city (Rev 21:23; Koester 2018, p. 194). There is no need for a temple in which God and the Lamb might dwell because the entire city functions like a temple. The stunning city in which God lives intimately among its residents is a light to the nations in which nothing impure or shameful will ever be allowed to enter (Rev 21:22–27).

The final hope in Revelation is thus that the tension between the majesty of the heavenly temple and the instability of the harsh life on earth will one day be resolved, as God descends to earth in the heavenly city to live directly with the people of God. The calls to faithful witness that are found throughout the Apocalypse thus follow from the certain anticipation that God is worthy of praise in the heavenly temple, that God will act on behalf of God's people, and that God will one day live directly among the faithful in a display of glory that will set all things right.

5. Metaphors and New Testament Theology

The examination of the temple metaphor in John, Paul's letters, and Revelation suggests that the study of metaphors provides one with a rich means by which to take up

NTT. The temple is a common referent among these texts, but the metaphor can be used for distinctive purposes depending on what the authors want to say and who they want to say it about. The temple image is thus multivalent. Although Jesus's body is the temple that is torn down and rebuilt in his death and resurrection, Paul locates the temple in the communities of believers that he addresses within his letters. As such, Paul's readers should demonstrate the unity and holiness that are characteristic of God's unique temple. Of the texts examined in this article, Revelation employs temple imagery in the most internally diverse ways. Allusions may be made to the Jerusalem temple, but John's visionary experience on Patmos takes him into a setting that is reminiscent of God's temple, while he is privy through his visions to God's actions in the heavenly temple. The ultimate hope that John offers to his readers is one in which God's people will dwell in a city that has no need of a temple because God indwells the entire city.

In light of the irreducible nature of metaphorical expression and the significant cognitive and identity constructing potential that recent scholarship has demonstrated in metaphor studies (e.g., [Soskice 1985](#), pp. 93–96; [Heim 2017a](#), pp. 104–10), the implications of these metaphors are worthy of additional research. When one looks at the preceding survey of temple metaphors collectively, the temple plays both a theological and a social role within the texts. Since the Johannine temple refers to the person of Jesus Christ, the revelation of God's presence is to be found in Jesus's body. The Word of God walks on the earth. Jesus's body is thus set apart and cannot be touched by Mary Magdalene after the resurrection (John 20:17). God also resides in the temple within the Pauline temple metaphors, but the referent of the temple has shifted. No longer does the temple refer to Jesus's body but to the community of believers who worship Jesus. There are vital social consequences for Paul's metaphor. If the Corinthians and Ephesians are God's temple, they must live a holy lifestyle in unity with one another since they have been set apart as distinct places in which God is revealed. The theological and social implications of the temple metaphor come together in Rev 21–22. God dwells among the people in the new Jerusalem so that no symbolic location for God's presence is required. The theological and social are intertwined as the divine lives among believers. It would be disingenuous to reduce either the theological or social implications of the temple metaphor. Rather, close study of the metaphors enables a new appreciation for the connections between beliefs about God and beliefs about God's people in New Testament documents.

The cognitive and social effects of the temple metaphor for early Christian readers of these texts provide another avenue of study within NTT ([Marshall 2015](#)). Since temples were a location in which cultic duties were undertaken within the Roman world, the temple metaphor may be expected to have effects on the worship practices of early Christians. For example, if the Johannine Jesus can be portrayed in terms of a temple, worship is no longer tied to a specific location but rather to a person. Such an observation fits well with Jesus's words to the Samaritan woman in which he disconnects worship from specific mountains and describes worship in terms of spirit and truth (John 4:19–26). If Pauline communities are depicted as temples, then worship happens when members of the community are gathered together. Moreover, Pauline communities may extend their worship into times and spaces that might otherwise be regarded as common instead of cultically pure, thereby necessitating a holy lifestyle that makes ethical claims on believers' lives at all times.¹⁷ A similar effect may be found in the temple metaphor of Revelation, even though God's indwelling of the new Jerusalem is a hope that is distinguished from the present reality of the text's first readers in Asia Minor. Since God will one day live among God's people, readers are encouraged to testify truly and to continue in their faithful practice despite suffering. In this way, the temple metaphor in these New Testament texts may affect the location and mode of worship, while simultaneously impacting the way in which social identity was formed within the community. The faithful are tied together in or as God's temple so that they must persevere and remain holy in their relationship with Jesus.

A theological exploration of metaphors in the New Testament may also provide an alternative to other ways of writing NTT. The genre of NTT writings is regularly organised

either thematically or canonically.¹⁸ Thematic organisation often utilises dogmatic classifications or categories drawn from the New Testament as a frame to support the book (e.g., Vouga 2001). Others employ a canonical arrangement that follows canonical collections, approaches NTT book by book, or combines these two ways of writing to some degree (e.g., Thielman 2005). Both approaches are valuable and allow New Testament theologians to outline their work in meaningful ways. Approaching NTT with a view to the metaphors contained within the texts may allow for another method of outlining research within NTT to come into view. Since the metaphors to be examined would be limited by the metaphors that are found within the pages of the New Testament, theological studies of New Testament metaphors may arise organically from within the texts themselves. The role of the New Testament theologian would not thereby be eliminated. The influence of a particular New Testament scholar would remain evident in the process of selecting which metaphors to discuss, determining when a metaphor is utilised, and interpreting what the metaphors mean within the documents.¹⁹ Yet a theologically oriented examination of metaphors provides both a starting place for such a study and a control that allows for a theology of the New Testament to arise organically.

These reflections on the implications and effects of the temple metaphor also offer hope that continued study of the temple and other metaphors may yield fresh insights into the links between New Testament understandings of both God and the community, as well as a new scaffolding around which to build an NTT. Studies of metaphors found in multiple New Testament books may also enable theological readers of the New Testament to wrestle afresh with both the unity and diversity of this collection.²⁰ Utilising the terms unity and diversity, that are most strongly associated in New Testament studies with Dunn (1977), theological explorations of metaphors occurring in multiple books are primed to be attentive to both facets. On the one hand, the same metaphor may be employed across multiple books in the New Testament. The temple is one such example. Research conducted on a metaphor that is found in multiple texts allows for a strong point of connection to be made from the start, since similar metaphorical modes of expression may be found across a variety of New Testament texts. Additional commonalities may be found in how metaphors are employed by different authors, but these points of potential unity cannot be determined from the outset. Thus, on the other hand, a theological study of New Testament metaphors allows researchers to examine a high degree of diversity in the New Testament. Although New Testament texts may utilise the same images, they are under no compulsion to speak of the metaphors in the same way. This diversity is evident in how New Testament authors exploit the symbolic capital of the temple to speak of Jesus, the people of God, God's presence in heaven, or God's future dwelling among believers. Study of unity and diversity thus arises naturally by giving attention to the theological significance of New Testament metaphors.

Finally, a theological study of metaphors in the New Testament may also engage ongoing calls to examine the documents of the New Testament with a view to their reception history in early Christianity (e.g., Bockmuehl 2006, pp. 169–228; Buttica 2019, p. 530). The New Testament is a relatively small corpus of writings, and interpreters may gain greater insight into how specific metaphors functioned within early Christianity by giving attention to extracanonical texts from the late first and second centuries. In the case of the temple, additional studies would doubtless want to take up temple imagery employed in Heb 9:1–10, 1 Pet 2:4–10, and elsewhere in the New Testament. Yet one might note that there are similarities between Paul's depiction of believers in terms of a temple and the metaphorical temple language in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch (Legarthy 1992, pp. 139–231; Kieffer 2000; see Ignatius, Ephesians 9.1; 15.3; Magnesians 7.2; Philadelphians 7.2). Second-century texts share a metaphorical understanding of the temple with Paul that extends the temple's significance to the everyday lives of believers, while they simultaneously specify the importance of the temple ethic with regard to sexual relationships (1 Cor 6:19–20; Acts of Paul 3.5; 2 Clement 9.3). If one considers the portrayal of the tower constructed in the Shepherd of Hermas (*Vision 3; Similitude 9*) as a kind of temple, further similarities between

New Testament temple metaphors and second-century symbolism appear (Lookadoo 2021, pp. 187–203). Jesus is included as part of the temple that Hermas sees (*Vision* 9.2.1–2 [79.1–2]; 9.12.1–2 [89.1–2]), while believers are united as stones in the tower so that differences between the stones cease to be apparent (*Vision* 3.2.6 [10.6]; *Similitude* 9.9.7 [86.7]). Examples could be multiplied across early Christian texts, but these may be enough to illustrate that holiness, unity, and the presence of Jesus are significant in other temple metaphors. The study of metaphors thus opens new avenues along which the reception history of the canonical New Testament can be discussed alongside NTT.

6. Conclusions

This article found its starting point by observing how several *Neutestamentler* have attempted to resolve challenges within the discipline. More specifically, the provocation for this essay concerns ongoing discussions about the role of theology in the study of the New Testament. Although New Testament Studies engage in a variety of studies that extend beyond NTT, this article has outlined the value of a particular type of theological study of the New Testament, namely, the study of metaphors within the New Testament. After noting the prevalence of images and metaphors in the New Testament, consideration was given to how metaphors have been studied in recent Humanities scholarship. Although metaphors are a linguistic phenomenon in which one entity is discussed in terms of another, they are not merely rhetorical ornaments. Rather, metaphors frame the concepts that a person has available to them and thus have vital cognitive and social capacities.

Following these observations, the study turned to consider three metaphorical usages of the temple in the New Testament. The Gospel of John employs temple language to identify Jesus so that Jesus's crucified and resurrected body is to be understood in terms of a temple. The temple shifts referents within the Pauline corpus. Paul depicts communities of believers as the temple in which the Lord resides with the result that believers are called to be unified with one another and to live in holy ways befitting their status as temples. The temple remains the location in which God's presence dwells in the New Testament Apocalypse, but the referent of the temple is particularly flexible. John sees the temple in his vision of the risen Lord on Patmos, may refer to the Jerusalem temple, refers to the heavenly temple several times, and closes with a stunning vision of the new Jerusalem without a temple because God indwells the entire city.

Temple metaphors do not neatly separate the theological from the social. The temple entails beliefs about God's presence among and availability to believers in a robustly theological manner. At the same time, New Testament temple metaphors make certain demands on the lives of believers that are inescapable. By examining temple metaphors, *Neutestamentler* are able to wrestle with both the theological beliefs and the social practices of early Christians as they are attested in the New Testament. In addition, the metaphors lend themselves to studies of unity and diversity in the New Testament, since the same metaphor may appear in multiple texts as part of a common linguistic reservoir but may also be used for different purposes as required by the author's situation. Finally, New Testament metaphors may be examined alongside their reception history in order to come to a fuller understanding of how other early Christians utilised similar metaphors and to gauge the effects of a metaphor on some later believers.

In light of the disputed place of NTT within New Testament Studies, constructing a means by which theological explorations of the New Testament can be undertaken through a more or less agreed upon method may appear to be a hopeless enterprise. This article hopes nevertheless to have made a modest contribution to the place of NTT as part of public discourse, by setting out crumbs along the way for a theological study of New Testament metaphors and its inclusion within NTT. A thorough study of New Testament metaphors could draw from other interdisciplinary scholarship to examine the wide-ranging metaphorical language sprinkled across the pages of the New Testament, in ways that acknowledge both the theological and social implications of the metaphors, while

simultaneously recognising the unity, diversity, and ongoing influence of the metaphors within the New Testament and elsewhere in early Christianity.

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Notes

- 1 For the language of identity as a means by which to describe the discipline, I am indebted to [Hatina \(2013, pp. 12–18\)](#).
- 2 For a full engagement with Räsänen's hermeneutics, see [Eskola \(2013\)](#), and, on NTT more specifically, [Eskola \(2013, pp. 235–317\)](#).
- 3 It may also be worth noting that some who study religion from a more explicitly 'Religious Studies' paradigm have been reticent to give up the value of a religious insider's perspective completely. See [Smart \(1986\)](#); [Wilken \(1989\)](#).
- 4 Green writes more fully about theological interpretation in his 2011 book, *Practicing Theological Interpretation* ([Green 2011a](#)). On history and theological interpretation, see also [Rae \(2016\)](#); [Heim \(2017b\)](#).
- 5 Similar stories can also be found in 4 Ezra 8.41–44; Gospel of Thomas 9; Seneca, *Epistulae morales* 38.2.
- 6 This attempt follows the call of [Vouga \(2007, pp. 164–66\)](#) to understand NTT as an interdisciplinary dialogue.
- 7 There have, of course, been other attempts to define metaphor. One could start with ancient definitions, such as those found in Aristotle, *De arte poetica* 1457b; Quintilian, *Institutionis oratoriae liber* 8.6.8. For more recent attempts to define metaphor, see ([Richards 1936, pp. 89–114](#); [Black 1962, pp. 25–47](#); [Ricoeur 1975](#); [Booth 1979](#); [Cameron and Low 1999](#); [Steen 2008](#); [Kövecses 2010, pp. 3–15](#)).
- 8 The role of metaphor in education and in engaging the emotions are thereby significant fields of study within the field of metaphor studies. For concise overviews, see ([Kövecses 2008](#); [Low 2008](#); [Littlemore 2017](#)).
- 9 For a different but related distinction, see [Lewis \[1939\] \(Lewis \[1939\] 1979\)](#), who distinguishes a 'Master's Metaphor' from a 'Pupil's Metaphor'.
- 10 [Yu \(2008\)](#) helpfully surveys various ways in which the body can also be a source for metaphors in both Chinese and English.
- 11 On the fusion of temporal horizons in the Gospel of John, see ([Frey 2013](#); [2018, pp. 73–99](#)).
- 12 See [Rahner \(1998\)](#) for more on the place of Jesus as God's revelation in the Gospel of John.
- 13 For a slightly different intertextual reading, that takes into account both Ps 68:10 and the identification of Jesus's body as temple, see [Klem \(2021\)](#).
- 14 References to 'Paul' and 'Pauline' letters or theology are to be understood with reference to the corpus of thirteen letters that are written in his name and collected in the New Testament. Authorship of some of the letters is disputed. For the purposes of this article, the date and authorship of Ephesians is most heavily disputed, on which see [Best \(1998, pp. 6–36\)](#); [Hoehner \(2002, pp. 2–61\)](#); [Sellin \(2009\)](#); [Thielman \(2010, pp. 1–5\)](#). Nevertheless, arguments for and against authorship of a particular letter by the historical Paul will be left to one side for this article, since the ultimate aim of the article is to contribute to ongoing discussions about NTT. For the sake of a theological reading of the New Testament, the placement of the letters within the Pauline corpus may be more important than determining the letters' dates and authorship precisely.
- 15 On the use of ethnic terminology in Ephesians, see [Harrill \(2014\)](#).
- 16 This article will utilise 'Revelation', 'the Apocalypse', and 'the New Testament Apocalypse' as synonyms referring to the same text. On the other hand, lowercase references to an 'apocalypse' or to 'apocalyptic' designate a genre of Second Temple Jewish literature.
- 17 The temple imagery in 1 Corinthians works alongside terms separating insiders and outsiders to create high boundaries. On outsider designations in 1 Corinthians, see [Trebilco \(2017, pp. 213–19\)](#).
- 18 On the interplay between the activities of New Testament theologians and the genre of NTT books, see [Morgan \(2007\)](#).
- 19 Of course, this statement applies *mutatis mutandis* to the study of New Testament temple metaphors in this article.
- 20 For a recent discussion of unity and diversity with regard to NTT, see [Frey \(2007, pp. 34–38\)](#).

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