

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

JOHN 2:13 And the Jews' pass-over was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem,

14 And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting:

15 And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the

sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables;

16 And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise.

17 And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.

NOTES

Jesus Cleanses God's House

Lesson Text: John 2:13-17

Related Scriptures: Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48;
Jeremiah 7:1-15; Isaiah 56:1-7; Psalm 69:6-13

TIME: between A.D. 26 and 30

PLACE: Jerusalem

GOLDEN TEXT—“And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables” (John 2:15).

Lesson Exposition

A SEASON OF PILGRIMAGE—

John 2:13

People traveled from both within and outside of Judea to the celebration at the temple in Jerusalem during Passover. The parallel accounts all clearly locate the cleansing of the temple shortly following Jesus' ride into Jerusalem on a donkey (cf. Matt. 21:1-17; Mark 11:1-19; Luke 19:28-48). The Passover sacrifice was personally paralleled in the death of Jesus.

Because John recorded Jesus cleansing the temple early in his Gospel, while the other Gospels record it shortly before Jesus' death, some think Jesus cleansed the temple twice. Others argue John mentioned the event early in order to make a point. Jesus' miracles in John tend to correspond with His “I am” statements. For example, Jesus fed the five thousand and declared that He is the Bread of Life in chapter 6. He said that He is the Resurrection and the Life when He raised Lazarus in chapter 11. The point being made in John 2 is that Jesus replaces the temple with His once-for-all sacrifice for sin (cf. vss. 19-22).

In the first century A.D., Passover still included the sacrifice of a lamb by each household. Adherents would roast the lamb. Interestingly, the early church father Justin Martyr wrote that the roasted Passover lamb was in the shape of a cross, with one skewer from top to bottom and another going across its back (*Dialogue with Trypho*).

THE SITUATION IN THE TEMPLE—

John 2:14-15

The merchants in the temple courts (John 2:14). The pilgrimage festivals drew Jews from near and far. Even non-Jewish people from the nations, hearing about Israel's God, would also sometimes come. They could worship the Lord too. This was the purpose of the outer court of the temple, the Court of the Gentiles. However, this outer court had become congested with those offering money exchange services and selling sacrificial animals.

That there was an exchange market for money was not problematic. Roman money had unacceptable imagery of the emperor on it and needed to be exchanged for acceptable coinage to pay

the temple tax. It also was not problematic that there was a market for animals for pilgrims who had come a great distance. The market was necessary for those who traveled long distances.

The first problem was that the markets had become corrupt. The exchangers and sellers were likely taking advantage of faithful worshippers who traveled a long way by charging outrageous prices. If someone wanted to worship the Lord but could not bring an animal over a great distance, he would have to pay whatever was necessary to buy animals to make the sacrifices. It would have been easy for merchants to raise prices astronomically around the festivals, knowing faithful worshippers would still pay.

The second issue was that the merchants were selling in the outer temple court, preventing Gentiles from worshipping God without distractions. The sounds (and smells) of animals would have made it hard for inquirers from the nations to seek the Lord. God had always intended for foreigners to seek Him (cf. Ex. 12:48-49; Num. 15:14-16). By selling animals in the outer court, Israel was hindering the nations. Acting like thieves and keeping the nations from seeking the Lord was unacceptable to Jesus.

This was recognized as an issue of injustice even by rabbis of Jesus' day. There was significant conflict between the Sadducees, who had control of the temple, and the Pharisees. Later Jewish tradition found in the Talmud included a curse on the Sadducees for their greed, indicating they were receiving a cut of the profits.

Jesus drives out the merchants (John 2:15). Jesus made a whip and drove out those selling animals and exchanging money. Jesus overturned their tables and scattered their money. That made them angry, and they would have made far less money (or even lost

money) due to this disruptive event. But Jesus was not afraid to anger people if it was necessary.

In the parallel passage in Mark 11:17, Jesus quoted Isaiah 56:7 that God's house was to be a house of prayer for all nations, but they had made it a den of thieves. The temple court was meant to be the place where inquirers from the nations would seek the Lord. Jesus' concern was fueled in part by the collapse of this missional element of temple life. He cared for the nations.

The fury of Jesus' response appears to reflect the words of Malachi 3:1-3 that the Lord would send His messenger and that the Lord Himself would suddenly come to His temple. But who, Malachi asked Israel warningly, can endure the day of His coming? For He is like a refiner's fire and like soap. He would purify the sons of Levi and purge them that they might offer an offering in righteousness. Cleansing the temple was not just about purging but about purifying the sons of Levi. The celebration of the Passover required participants to undergo ritual cleansing. It was not just the people, however, that needed to be cleansed—the focus in the Gospel of John is on the temple itself and its need of cleansing (Thompson, *John: A Commentary*, Westminster John Knox).

THE ZEAL OF JESUS—John 2:16-17

Jesus rebukes those profiting from the pilgrims (John 2:16). Jesus focused on those selling pigeons and doves. These birds were used as an offering by the poor who could not afford a larger animal (cf. Lev. 12:8). Although He drove out all the animals, Jesus' rebuke put a focus on those who were using their position to take advantage of the poor.

This event was prophesied in Zechariah 14:21, which says, "In that day there shall be no more the Canaanite in the house of the Lord of hosts." The Hebrew word translated as "Canaanite" conveys

the idea of “merchant,” “trafficker,” or “trader.” See how the word is translated in Job 41:6 and Proverbs 31:24. Zechariah prophesied that one day there would no longer be merchants in the house of the Lord of Hosts. Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy by driving out the money changers and merchants.

Imagine how lucrative price gouging for sacrificial animals would have been during Passover. Allowing the sale of animals in the temple courts virtually guaranteed a massive profit for those selling in the temple. It also ensured that those in charge of the temple would get a cut of the profits.

Jesus contrasted the phrase “my Father’s House” with “house of trade” in a way that might have brought to mind His stinging words that no one can serve two masters and one cannot serve both God and money (Matt. 6:24). The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil (1 Tim. 6:10). Are there areas in your life where you are willing to compromise to make money?

Jesus’ disciples reflect on His actions (John 2:17). Jesus’ disciples remembered the words of Psalm 69:9. But note that John’s Gospel changes the verb from the past to the future tense. This may have been because Jesus lived centuries after David, or because Jesus’ zeal for the house of God would consume Him as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29). The temple of His body would soon be destroyed and raised up again (2:19-22). Yet we can also see that Jesus was zealous for the temple as His Father’s house.

As the disciples considered the events in the temple, they connected them with Psalm 69. They saw that the zeal Jesus demonstrated for His Father’s house. The psalmist had been insulted for his zeal and became a stranger to his brothers. Not only did Jesus have zeal for God’s house, but

reproaches fell on Him as well. The psalmist was rejected, and the insults of his brethren fell on him. There seems to be an allusion here to Jesus’ future death. During His crucifixion, He was widely mocked, ridiculed, and rejected (Luke 23:35).

Jesus was the perfect fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Even prophecies that initially seemed so contradictory that people thought they were about different people (such as prophecies about the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53 and prophecies about the victorious Messiah) were perfectly fulfilled in Jesus. Some of these He fulfilled effortlessly, such as being born in Bethlehem (cf. Mic. 5:2), and some He fulfilled intentionally (cf. John 19:28). Christ’s zeal for God’s house seems to be a prophecy He fulfilled effortlessly.

—Matthew Friedman

QUESTIONS

1. Why might John have recorded events out of order in his Gospel?
2. How far did people travel for Passover?
3. Could Gentiles participate in Passover?
4. What was the first main problem with the temple?
5. What was the second main problem with the temple?
6. What Old Testament passage did Jesus quote in the parallel passage in Mark?
7. What had Malachi prophesied about the Lord’s messenger?
8. Why might Jesus have focused on the sellers of doves?
9. How did Jesus fulfill Zechariah 14?
10. How did Jesus fulfill Psalm 69?

—Tom Greene

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Jesus consistently prioritized the worship of God, and so should we (John 2:13).
2. We will sometimes encounter people who hinder the worship of God and extort others (vs. 14).
3. We must oppose those who make it difficult to worship God (vs. 15).
4. We should stand up to those who take advantage of the poor, not look the other way (vs. 16).
5. We must resist any efforts to corrupt God's worship into a way to make money.
6. Strong emotions and actions are sometimes the most appropriate response to a situation (vs. 17).

—Tom Greene

RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. Had you been among Jesus' disciples, what *other* Old Testament passages might you have also reflected on?
2. How is Jesus our temple? In what sense are the people of God now a temple (cf. Eph. 2:19-22; 2 Pet. 2:4-5)?
3. What circumstances have inspired passion and zeal in you?
4. Have you ever faced a corrupting influence in a church context? How did you respond?
5. How should we respond when we see God dishonored in the church? Are we ever called to react as strongly as Jesus did here?
6. Is there anything in your life that is meant to be for God's glory but you are misusing? What is it, and how do you need to restore it to its proper place?

—Matthew Friedman

Golden Text Illuminated

“And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables” (John 2:15).

Have you ever been to Europe and seen the cathedrals? Many are only tourist sites now or have been changed into businesses. They lost the purpose for which they were built. In John 2:15, Jesus cleanses the temple. It reminds us how we should be careful of our worship and remain dedicated to glorifying God.

Jesus fashioned a whip, demonstrating a deliberate intention to cleanse the temple. Jesus was committed to maintaining the purity of the temple, which extends to the purity of our hearts and lives. Jesus had an unwavering resolve to remove anything that hindered true worship and desired transformation and renewal. As believers, we are temples of the Holy Spirit (cf. 1 Cor. 6:19). We must examine our hearts and lives. Are there any areas of distraction, greed, or compromise? We need to drive out those ungodly behaviors and attitudes.

Jesus had reverence for the temple, which represented God's presence, and He was unwilling to tolerate its desecration. We need to approach our times and spaces of worship with reverence, ensuring they are kept holy. Jesus' challenged religious corruption continuously. The need for purification is ongoing. We cannot rely on a past experience of cleansing; it is a continuous process of self-examination, repentance, and surrender to the work of the Holy Spirit.

—Page Brooks