



# Cleansing the Temple

John 2:13-25

Notes: The *MacArthur Study Bible* by John MacArthur was used as a reference in developing this Bible Study. The Scripture references in this Bible study are taken from the New King James Version.

## **2:13–17 How did Jesus demonstrate His deity by what He did at the Temple?**

Jesus demonstrated His deity in His passion for reverence. Only God may regulate His worship.

## **2:13 Why did Jesus go to Jerusalem?**

Jesus' journeying to Jerusalem for the Passover was a standard annual procedure for every devout Jewish male over 12 years old. Consequently, Jewish pilgrims crowded into Jerusalem for this greatest of Jewish feasts...

Deut 16:16 - Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.

## **What was the Passover?**

Passover commemorates the deliverance of the Jews from slavery in Egypt when the angel of death "passed over" Jewish homes in Egypt whose "doorposts" were sprinkled with lambs blood (Ex. 12:23–27).

## **2:13 What time of year is the Passover?**

The Passover of the Jews indicates that it was in the Spring. Jews celebrated Passover on the 14th day of the lunar month of Nisan.

## **2:14 What did Jesus find in the temple?**

Jesus found business men and money changers in the temple.

## **What were the merchants doing in the temple?**

During Passover, worshipers came from great distances to Jerusalem making it inconvenient to bring their sacrificial animals with them. Opportunistic merchants, set up shop in the outer courts of the temple in order for travelers to buy animals.

## **Why were the money changers at the temple?**

The money changers were needed because the temple tax, paid annually by every conscientious Jewish male 20 years of age or older (Ex. 30:13, 14; Matt. 17:24–27), had to be in Jewish or Tyrian coinage (because of its high purity of silver). Those coming from foreign lands would need to exchange their money into the proper coinage for the tax.

## **Weren't the merchants and money changer performing a valuable service? What was the problem with them?**

With such a large group of travelers and because of the seasonal nature of the celebration, both the animal dealers and money exchangers exploited the situation for monetary gain. Jesus referred to them as a "*den of thieves*" in Matt. 21:13. Temple worship had become crass and materialistic.

## **The synoptic gospels record a temple cleansing at the end of Jesus' ministry during the final Passover week before Jesus' crucifixion. How do you reconcile that with John account that occurred at the beginning of His ministry?**

There had to be at least two temple cleansing occasions by Jesus. It may have even been an annual event at Passover during His ministry. This would be consistent with how the Jews had responded to the ministry of Jesus for the Jewish nation as a whole never recognized His authority as Messiah:

Matthew 23:37 - O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing!

## **What did Jesus do to the merchants and money changers in the temple?**

Jesus drove the men and their animals out of the temple with a whip of cords that He made.

## **Was what Jesus did with the whip cruel?**

The whip was necessary to get the animals moving. The fact that His action was actually moderate is seen in the fact that no riotous uproar occurred; otherwise the Roman troops would have gotten involved. There was an especially large contingent of Roman troops in Jerusalem because of the Passover crowds. They were stationed in the Antonia

Fortress overlooking the temple so they could have reacted swiftly if a riot did start. It is likely that the merchants and money changers returned to the temple once Jesus had left.

### **Is this temple incident a fulfillment of Malachi 3:1-3?**

Mal 3:1-3 - Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming," says the LORD of hosts. But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; he will purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer to the LORD an offering in righteousness.

Jesus' actions in cleansing the temple were an initial fulfillment of Mal. 3:1-3 that speaks of the Messiah purifying the religious worship of His people. The ultimate fulfillment will occur when He returns to establish His kingdom.

### **2:16 If the merchants and moneychangers were more honest in their dealings with the people going to the temple would Jesus have treated them differently?**

Their degree of honesty wasn't the issue. Even though they were opportunists, taking advantage of the situation, they were providing a service that people were willing to pay for. Instead, the temple was a holy place, set aside for the worship of God. The merchants and money changers were bringing the activities of the world into the place of worship

### **2:17 What did the cleansing of the temple cause the disciples to remember?**

The disciples recalled Psalm 69:9...

Psalm 69:9 - Because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.

### **What does Psalm 69:9 tell us about God?**

God takes worship very seriously and He is distressed by irreverence in places designated for corporate worship.

### **Given that when David wrote psalm 69:9, he was being persecuted because of his zeal toward God's house and his defense of God's honor. How do you think Jesus' actions in cleansing the temple made the disciple feel?**

The disciples were probably concerned that Jesus' actions would result in the same type of persecution. Paul quotes the latter half of Ps. 69:9 ("*The reproaches of those who reproached You fell on Me*") in Romans 15:3, indicating the messianic nature that the psalm had for the early church.

### **2:18-22 In what way did Jesus demonstrate His deity in John 2:18-22?**

Jesus demonstrated His deity by showing His power over death through resurrection. Only God has this right.

### **2:18 Who were "the Jews" referred to in this verse?**

Most likely the Jews were the temple authorities or representatives of the Sanhedrin.

### **Why did the Jews ask for Jesus to show them a sign?**

- The Jews demanded that Jesus show some type of miraculous sign that would indicate His authority for the actions that He had just taken in regulating the activities of the temple.
- Their demand of a sign reveals that they had not grasped the significance of Jesus' rebuke that centered in their need for proper attitudes and holiness in worship.

### **How was the action Jesus took to cleanse the temple in itself a sign that He had the authority of God?**

The action Jesus took was consistent with what Scripture tells us God thought of the gouging of people at the temple (recall Psalm 69:9).

### **How did the Jews requesting a miracle from Jesus reflect their unbelief in who He was?**

Jesus action at the temple should have been a sign enough for His authority, their requiring miracles on demand demonstrated that they did not know with whom they were dealing....

Matthew 12:38-40 - Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth."

### **2:19 What was Jesus referring to in this verse?**

Jesus was talking about the resurrection of His body (John 2:21)...

1 Corinthians 6:19 - Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

### **How did the Jewish religious authorities use this statement to condemn Jesus when they turned Him over to be crucified?**

At his trial, the authorities charged Jesus (Mark 14:29, 58) with making a threatening statement against the temple, revealing that they did not understand Jesus' response here.

**Why did Jesus use symbolic language here? Why didn't He come right out and say that His body would be resurrected?**

As with His usage of parables, Jesus' cryptic statement most likely was designed to reveal the truth to His disciples but conceal its meaning from unbelievers who questioned Him:

Matthew 13:10-15 - And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" He answered and said to them, "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. And in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: 'Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.'"

**When did the disciples understand what Jesus was telling them about His resurrection?**

Only after His resurrection did the disciples understand the real significance of this statement (John 2:22).

**2:20 How did this verse indicate that the Jews did not understand what Jesus was talking about?**

It had taken forty-six years to build the temple that Jesus had cleansed. When the captives returned from Babylon, Zerubbabel and Joshua began rebuilding the temple (Ezra 1-4). The Jews completed the work in 516 b.c. In 20/19 b.c. Herod the Great began a reconstruction and expansion. Workers completed the main part of the project in 10 years, but other parts were still being constructed even at the time Jesus cleansed the temple. Interestingly, the finishing touches on the whole enterprise were still being made at its destruction by the Romans along with Jerusalem in a.d. 70. The famous "Wailing Wall" is built on part of the Herodian temple foundation.

**2:23-25 In what way did Jesus demonstrate His deity in John 2:23-25?**

Jesus demonstrated His deity by showing His ability to know the hearts of men. Only God truly knows the hearts of men.

**2:23 What was the result of the miracles Jesus performed?**

Many people came to believe in the name of Jesus.

**What does it mean to believe in the name of Jesus?**

They came to know Him as a great miracle worker and teacher. This does not necessarily mean that they trusted Him for their salvation (see John 2:24). It means the name of Jesus became famous.

**2:24 What does it mean that Jesus did not commit Himself to those who believed in His name?**

Jesus had made it His habit not to wholeheartedly "entrust" or "commit" Himself to people because He knew their hearts. Verse 24 indicates that Jesus looked for genuine conversion rather than enthusiasm for the spectacular. I call them miracle groupies.

**What then is the difference between believing in the name of Jesus as verses 23 and 24 refer to versus believing in the name of Jesus that leads to salvation?**

While people witnessed the miracles, they did not necessarily attribute them to the work of God. They accused Him of casting out demons by being in league with Beelzebub, the ruler of demons (Matthew 12:24). True belief in the name of Jesus is to trust in His character as God rather than to make just an intellectual assent to Him. It called for whole-hearted commitment of one's life as Jesus' disciple...

Matthew 16:24-25 - Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."