

Exegetical Notes, John 2:12-25 “Jesus Visits the Temple”

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John 2:12-25

Verses 12-17

After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and brothers and his disciples. There they stayed for a few days.

¹³ *When it was almost time for the Jewish Passover, Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*

¹⁴ *In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵ So he made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple courts, both sheep and cattle; he scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ To those who sold doves he said, “Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it is written: “Zeal for your house will consume me.”*

- Even though Jesus was from Nazareth in Galilee, scholars believe that Capernaum was the center, or home base, of Jesus’ ministry. That is where he went following the wedding feast in Cana.
- As the Passover was approaching, Jesus went to Jerusalem to celebrate it. It was, and still is, the hope of all good Jews to celebrate the Passover in the Holy City, Jerusalem. Jesus was following the customs of the Jews by going there to celebrate this Passover.
- While in Jerusalem, Jesus went to the Temple, the most holy place on earth for Jews. In the court of the Gentiles, the first court or room in the temple, Jesus discovered people selling cattle, sheep, doves and exchanging money. The animals were on sale to be used as sacrifices in temple worship. Money had to be exchanged because the legal tender of the day bore the heads of Roman Emperors, many of whom were considered gods. The Old Testament forbids graven images and these likenesses were considered to be graven images. Thus, the coins used for everyday use could not be used to make offerings in the temple.
- Jesus was offended by the presence of these things and these people in the temple. So he made a whip out of some rope he found there and used it to drive the animals, and the sellers of them, out of the temple. He also upset

the tables of the money exchangers. He told them all to leave the temple and to stop making God's house a market place.

- Undoubtedly, this caused a great commotion in the court of the Gentiles. Jesus' disciples could not have missed it. They remembered the words from Psalm 69:9, "zeal for your house consumes me." For them, this was more evidence that Jesus was Israel's Messiah.

Verses 18-22

¹⁸ The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." ²⁰ They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" ²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

- Not only had Jesus' disciples witnessed this event, but so had the Jewish temple authorities. They demanded some proof from Jesus that he had authority to act in this manner.
- Jesus said that the sign of his authority to act would be his resurrection from the dead. "Destroy this temple," meaning his physical body (see 1 Corinthians 3:6-7), "and I will raise it up in three days." But the Jews misunderstood his statement, thinking he meant the temple in which they all stood. This classic misunderstanding becomes a tool used by John to prompt us to think more deeply about Jesus' words (see John 3:1-14).
- Work on Herod's Temple began in 20BC. It was not finished until 64 AD. At the time when Jesus cleansed the temple, the work had been in progress for 46 years. Thus, these events happened sometime around 26-28 AD.
- Jesus' meaning became clear to his disciples only after he rose from the dead.

Verses 23-25

Now while he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Festival, many people saw the signs he was performing and believed in his name. ²⁴ But Jesus would not entrust himself to them, for he knew all people. ²⁵ He did not need any testimony about mankind, for he knew what was in each person.

- Jerusalem would have been crowded with pilgrims during the celebration of the Passover then, even as it is today. Thus, many people saw and heard what Jesus did there. As a result, many of them came to believe that he was Israel's Messiah.

- But Jesus knew the hearts of men. He knew that, in the end, even some of those who had believed would call for his death. He knew from the beginning that even his own would run in fear leaving him alone, and that Peter would deny him. Thus, Jesus did not become attached to the opinions of people. He simply remained true to the task assigned him by God.

General Comments:

- The other Gospels do not place the cleansing of the temple at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. In fact, they place it at the end of Jesus' ministry. This leads to some questions. When did this event take place? Which accounts are reliable?
- Many scholars conclude that there were two cleansings of the temple, one at the beginning of Jesus' ministry and one at the end. This is because there are some similarities and some differences in the story. The differences include... the whip, which is only mentioned in John; the Jews demand for a sign to justify Jesus' authority to act in this way is mentioned in Mark but is not immediate to the event; and the timing. Scholars point out that at Jesus' trial, the charge that he said he would destroy the temple and raise it in three days is known. They say it would not likely have been known if it had been spoken only a few days before the trial.
- Therefore, it seems that Jesus did the same thing at both ends of his ministry. Nothing changed after the first cleansing. Its repetition indicates that God was still not pleased with the way his house was being used.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Jesus Visits the Temple*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship* & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)