

Cleansing the Temple

Key Verse: *“To those who sold doves he said, Get these out of here!*

Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!”

—John 2:16, New International Version

Selected Scripture:
John 2:13-22

JESUS WAS BORN “UNDER the law,” and all male Jews were required to appear before the Lord at three feasts each year. (Gal. 4:4; Exod. 23:14-17; Deut. 16:16) This lesson finds Jesus in Jerusalem at the time of the Jewish Passover feast. As one faithfully keeping the Law, Jesus went directly to the Temple, the center of Israel’s religious worship.

“In the temple courts he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money.” (John 2:14) When the Israelites came to Jerusalem to keep these required feasts, certain sacrifices and offerings were made. The original intent of the Law given by God was that each family would provide their own animals and offerings for such occasions. However, the Jewish leaders saw these occasions as opportunities to engage in the “business” of selling these things to the people at the Temple. This eliminated the necessity for the people to make the personal effort to bring animals and other offerings on the long journey to Jerusalem.

When Jesus saw this going on at the Temple, 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,” and said,

“Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father’s house into a market!” (vss. 15,16, *NIV*) Jesus responded strongly to this sinful condition for two reasons. First, he saw the greed of the religious leaders as they had made a business at the Temple, his “Father’s house,” demonstrating a lack of reverence for our Heavenly Father. Secondly, the people had allowed themselves to accept this lack of reverence for the house of God.

Seeing the strong action taken by their Master, Jesus’ disciples “recalled the scripture saying, I am consumed with zeal for thy house.” (vs. 17, *James Moffatt Translation*; Ps. 69:9) Jesus’ “zeal” was directed in righteous indignation against the hypocrisy he saw at the Jews’ Temple, mixing business with the worship of God.

God had instructed the Israelites, through his servant Moses: “What does the LORD your God ask of you but to fear [reverence] the LORD your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,” and to “have reverence for my sanctuary.” (Deut. 10:12; Lev. 19:30, *NIV*) However the nation of Israel, in general, failed to fully reverence the Lord. During Jesus’ earthly ministry he was asked, “Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” He replied, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”—Matt. 22:36,37, *NIV*

The Apostle Paul explained that Jesus and his church “are the temple of God.” (I Cor. 3:16) When the Lord’s people meet together, such gatherings should be considered as holy assemblies. Therefore, our conversations should build one another up along spiritual lines. The prophet Malachi wrote, “Those who feared the LORD with awe-filled reverence spoke to one another; and the LORD paid attention and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him of those who fear the LORD with an attitude of reverence and respect and who esteem His name.”—Mal. 3:16, *Amplified Bible* ■