

Cleansing the Temple

Key Verse: “[Jesus] said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise.”
—John 2:16

Selected Scripture:
John 2:13-22

THE APOSTLE PAUL STATES

concerning Jesus that he was “made of a woman, made under the law.” (Gal. 4:4) Being a Jew under the Law, he was required to keep the various feasts mandated under that covenant arrangement. It is in this setting that today’s lesson finds Jesus in Jerusalem at the time of the Jewish Passover feast. As we might expect from one faith-

fully keeping the Law, Jesus went directly to the Temple, the center of Israel’s religious worship.

The account states that upon his arrival, Jesus “found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting.” (John 2:14) At those times of the year when the Israelites came to Jerusalem to keep their required feasts, certain sacrifices and offerings were also made. The intent of the Law as originally given by God was that each family take care of providing the necessary animals and offerings for such occasions. Over time, however, the Jewish leaders saw these occasions as opportunities to engage in the “business” of selling these things to the people right there at the Temple. Doing so would eliminate the necessity of the people to go to the trouble of bringing animals and other offerings on the long journey to Jerusalem. As this became a more and more lucrative business, prices were raised and taxes

were charged, the benefits of which likely went into the coffers of the religious leaders of Israel.

When Jesus saw these things going on in the Temple, he “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; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise.” (vss. 15,16) In a similar account in Matthew 21:13, even stronger language is recorded: “My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.”

The sinful condition to which Jesus so strongly responded was really twofold. First, he saw the greed of the religious leaders as they overcharged and taxed the people for the animals and other offerings needful to keep the feasts according to the Law’s requirements. They were “thieves” carrying out their business in a “house of prayer.” Secondly, and no less important, was the fact that the people had allowed themselves to become part of this. No longer were they desirous of providing their own offerings to the Lord. They were willing to pay high prices and, in addition, be taxed for the “convenience” of not having to be bothered with such things. They were willing to “pay” their leaders in order to be counted as keeping the Law’s religious requirements.

Jesus’ disciples, seeing the swift action taken by the Master, “remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.” (John 2:17) The *Moffat Translation* renders the last portion of the verse this way, “I am consumed with zeal for thy house.” Although Jesus displayed anger against the hypocrisy he saw at the Temple, his “zeal” was primarily directed in a positive way toward his Father’s house, represented by the Temple. Apostle Paul tells us that, in reality, Jesus and his church are the real temple. It was this symbolic temple for which Jesus had such a great zeal and desire that it be faithfully completed.—Eph. 2:19-22 ■