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Jesus' First Cleansing of the Temple at the Passover John 2: 13-22

Jesus' first cleansing of the Temple at the Passover DIG: Who were the Sadducees and what did they believe in? Why would they be particularly angry at what Jesus was doing at the Temple at that time? If you were one of the Sadducees, how would you feel about Yeshua's cleaning house? How do you think you would feel if you were one of the talmidim? What affect did His actions have on the apostles? In what way was Jesus zealous for His Father's house?

REFLECT: If you compare your spiritual life to the rooms of a house, which room do you think Jesus might want to clean up: (a) Library - the reading room? (b) Dining room - appetites and desires? (c) Worship - where you keep you gifts, skills and talents? (d) Recreation room - where you hang out after work? (e) Family room - where most of your relationships are lived out? Or (f) the Closet - where your hang-ups are? Do you resist or welcome Christ's "clean up" operation in your life? Why?

Before the official beginning of **His** public ministry, **Jesus** had visited **the Temple** many times as a worshiper in **His Father's house** to celebrate feasts, observe sacrifices, and glorify **ADONAI**. That year, like all the others, **the Galilean Rabbi** didn't find a place of worship, but a shameless fraud, a shrine to greediness, and a sanctuary for thieves. Only that year something was very different.

Messiah drove out **the moneychangers** twice. The first time was here at the beginning of **His** public ministry, and the second time was at the end of **His** public ministry, shortly before **His** execution (**to see link click [Iv](#) - Jesus Entered the Temple Area and Drove Out All Who Were Buying and Selling**). These cleansings were like bookends to **His** First Coming. Within **the Temple Mount**, the Royal Stoa, among other uses, functioned as a



market place. With this knowledge it is easy to locate exactly where the cleansing of **the Temple Mount** took place. It was at the southern end, and in the most magnificent of all porticoes.

The direct way for **the Lord** to enter the Royal Stoa ran via the majestic stairway on the southwest corner of **the Temple**. Today it is known as Robinson's Arch, named after the biblical scholar Edward Robinson who identified its remnants in 1938. It carried traffic up from ancient **Jerusalem's** Lower Market area and over the Tyropoeon Street into the Royal Stoa. It was among the most massive stone arches in antiquity.³²⁰



From other later Jewish sources we know what was happening there, and the Pharisees didn't like it any more than **Jesus** did. **The Temple Mount** was under the control of **the Sadducees** in those days and the main **Sadducee** was **the high priest Annas**. **The rabbis called this "the bazaar of the sons of Annas."** This was a family business venture.

Annas was **the high priest**, while **the sons of Annas** were assistant priests, and assistant treasurers, **his** sons-in-law were **their** assistant treasurers. What a deal.

The Sadducees focused on political power. **They** were the religious liberals and aristocrats of Isra'el. The Pharisees and **the Sadducees** were continually at odds with each other. **The Sadducees** had more interest in the ceremonies of **the Temple** than in some hairsplitting interpretations of the Torah like the Pharisees where famous for. **They** believed in a literal interpretation of only the first five books of the Torah, not the Oral Law (see [Ei - Oral Law](#)). **Their** interests were in the political and secular realm in order to continue their lucrative control of **the Temple** and the priesthood. **Their** influence was among the wealthy of the nation. **They** believed that fate was in **their** own hands and denied both the resurrection of the dead and the existence of angels (**Mt 22:23; Mk 12:18; Lk 20:27; Acts 23:8**). **They** did not look forward to any messianic deliverance.

Despite **their** great power and influence (and partly because of it), most **Jews**, especially the Pharisees, did not respect **the Sadducees**, who were aloof from the common people and acted superior to them. But, **they** were also disliked for **their** theology, especially **their** most distinct belief that there was no resurrection.

Politically, **the Sadducees** were pro-Roman because it was only by Roman permission that **they** exercised not only **their** religious, but also their considerable political control over the people. Because **they** were valuable to the Romans in helping keep the people under control, the Romans delegated limited authority to **them**, even to the extent of having **their** own police force in the form of **the Temple** guard. Because of **their** complete dependence on Rome for **their** power, **they** were understandably extremely supportive of **their** pagan rulers. And for that **they** were also hated by the people.³²¹

There were two important financial aspects to the bazaar of the sons of Annas: the selling of lambs and the exchanging of money. The Torah said you had every right to bring your own sacrifice, but it had to be without spot or blemish (**Exodus 12:1-5**). But, the ones in charge of inspecting the lambs brought for sacrifice were **the sons of Annas**. **They charged an inspection fee that always went to Annas.** So, if you brought your own sacrifice, surprise, surprise, they always found something wrong with it. If your sacrifice was disqualified you would have one of two options. You could go home to get another one (if you lived outside **the City** by the time you got back you would have missed **the Passover** altogether), or you could just buy one of **the Temple** lambs (that were always perfect) at highly inflated prices that also went to **Annas**. During that sacred festival, the population of **Yerushalayim** would swell to more than 250,000 men. Josephus, the famous

Jewish historian, estimated that the total number of people was close to three million people. Clearly, the profit margin for the inspection and selling of lambs was astounding.

In addition, **the Jews** had to pay an annual **Temple** tax of half-a-shekel. **They** could not use Roman money because it had a picture (or an idol) of Caesar on it. Therefore, special coins had to be made. **So the Jews** brought **their** Roman money to **the moneychangers**, or **the sons of Annas**, who would change it into approved **Temple** currency. **They always charged a service fee for the transaction that not surprisingly, went to Annas.** This was the spectacle that **Jesus** found when **He** entered **the Temple courts.**

It was almost time for the Jewish Passover (John 2:13a). This is the first of four **Passovers** mentioned in the ministry of **Christ.** The first is mentioned here and in **John 2:23.** The second is in **John 5:1,** while the third is referred to in **John 6:4,** and the fourth in **John 11:55, 12:1, 13:1, 18:28** and **39,** and **19:14.** By dating these, we are able to conclude that **His** public ministry lasted three-and-a-half years.³²² The Gospel tradition suggests that **Jesus'** ministry began shortly after the John the Baptist's. **Luke** says that **Messiah** was **about thirty years of age** when **His** ministry began (**Luke 3:23**). So if our **Savior** were born in the winter of 5 or 4 BC, **He** would have been 33 or 34 in 29 AD (see [Aq - The Birth of Jesus](#)).

Jesus went up to Jerusalem (Yochanan 2:13b). **The City of David** stands near the highest point of the backbone of Judea, namely, the line of hills running north and south between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. Pitched on a height of about 2,610 feet above sea level, **Tziyon** must be approached by going **up.**

In the Temple [Mount] He found the sons of Annas selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money (John 2:14). The word here translated **Temple** is *hieron*, which is used for the whole **Temple Mount**, and is distinct from the word *naos* used in **verses 19** and **21,** which refer to **the Temple [Sanctuary]** itself.³²³ **The Sadducees** controlled the high priesthood and **the Temple Mount.** **They** had developed a sense of entitlement about **their** prophets. **They** had convinced themselves that **Ha'Shem** was blessing them because **they** were so spiritual.

No wonder **Jesus** was **zealous;** **His** reaction was entirely justified. **God** deserved better and so did the people. **He** must of thought to **Himself,** "How dare these religious leaders violate the sacred place where people ought to come in praise and worship of **ADONAI!**" **Christ's** actions in **the Temple** were not due to a loss of control. **He** did not lose **His** temper, or "blow up." **His** **zealousness** moved **Him** to exercise **God's** righteous judgment against unbelieving **Jews** who were defiling **His Temple** (see my commentary on

Jeremiah Eu - Idolatry in the Temple).

Such abuses required action. Simple words would not be enough. To pronounce divine judgment would require messianic force. What **He** did was an entirely appropriate response. And this gives us hope, for **the Holy Spirit** within us can also help us channel our anger in appropriate ways. As we turn to **the Lord**, we can **be angry but not sin (Ephesians 4:26)**.

Before the official beginning of **His** public ministry, **Jesus** had visited **the Temple** as a worshiper in **His Father's house**. But, now the time had come for **Him** to enter as **the Meshiach, the Temple's** rightful the owner and ruler. In fulfillment of prophecy (**Malachi 3:1-4**), **His** first official act was to purge **His Temple** of the false system of worship within. Filled with zealous righteousness, **Yeshua made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the Temple courts, both sheep and cattle; He scattered the coins of the moneychangers and overturned their tables (Yochanan 2:15)**. **The apostles** probably stood by in stunned silence as **the Master** tossed **tables and coins** all over the place.



The lash of **Messiah's whip** sent livestock scurrying as **His** voice echoed throughout the enormous columns in the Royal Stoa. **To those Sadducees who also sold doves** to the very poor **He said: Get these out of here! Stop turning my Father's house into a market!** Then suddenly, **His talmidim remembered that it is written in Psalm 69:9, "Zeal for Your house will consume Me,"** meaning *cause My destruction (John 2:16-17)*. This would literally be fulfilled because **the Sadducees** would later seek **His** death for what **He** did at that day at **the Temple Mount** (see **Ib - The Plot to Kill Jesus: The Rejection of the First Sign of Jonah**). After the Sanhedrin had **Him** arrested, **Annas** would question **Jesus** first before sending **Him** to **his** son-in-law, the acting **high priest**, Joseph Caiaphas who would arrange for **His** execution by the Romans.

Once the pandemonium died down, the inevitable confrontation came. **Yeshua** knew it

would happen . . . and what it would lead to. At that point, **the Sadducees** came to **Him** demanding a **sign**, saying: **What sign can You show us to prove your authority to do all this (Jn 2:18)?** The word **You** is emphatic in the Greek. Though **they** asked **the Lord** for a **sign** **they** mocked the suggestion that **He** (of all people) could do such a thing!

Like **Nehemiah (Neh 2:19-20, 6:2-3)**, **Yeshua** didn't waste **His** time with closed-minded people, In fact, **He** didn't speak in order to convince anyone. **His** words were actually intended to divide **His** audience into two groups: receptive hearts or hard hearts. **He** understood that hearing **Him** is not an intellectual process, but a crisis of the will. Thus, **Christ answered them** saying: **Destroy this naos, or Temple [Sanctuary], and I will raise it again in three days (Jn 2:19)**. First, to **destroy the Temple** would be impossible for one person. But, the idea of rebuilding it had messianic connotations. **The rabbis taught that the Messiah would rebuild the Temple**. This idea appears in the Dead Sea Scrolls. We also get some indication of this from **Zechariah 6:12-13**.

Just as **Yeshua** expected, the pompous **Sadducees** took **His** words literally: **It has taken forty-six years to build this Temple (John 2:20a)**. King Herod the Great (see [Av - The Visit of the Magi](#)) began the remodeling of the Second **Temple** complex around 19-20 BC. About two years were spent in preparation, which are not included in the **forty-six years**, so that this incident could have taken place any time between 26 and 30 AD. Herod's **Temple** may not have been entirely finished when the Romans destroyed it in 70 AD.³²⁴ **They** asked incredulously: **And You** (emphasis mine) **are going to raise it in three days (John 2:20b)?**

They would never forget **the Lord's** claim that day. In fact, it would be one of **their** main charges against **Him** at **His** trial (see [Lj - Jesus Before the Sanhedrin](#)), and **they** flung the same accusation at **Him** while **He** was dying on the cross (see [Lu - Jesus' First Three Hours on the Cross: Stage 11: The Fifth Mockery](#)). In addition, **Stephen's** murderers said: **We have heard [Stephen] say that this Jesus of Nazareth** (they always had to get **Nazareth** dig in there somehow), **will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us (Acts 6:14, and implied in 7:48 and 17:24)**. It is clear that the charge was persistent and repeated.

The inspired **author himself** then commented: **But the Temple He had spoken of was His body (Yochanan 2:21)**. The Sh'khinah glory had departed in the days of **Jeremiah (Ezeki'el 10:18)**. Therefore, **the Temple** had not been the dwelling place of **ADONAI** for centuries. When **Jesus** issued **His** challenge to the religious leaders, it's as if **He** pointed to **Himself** and said, "*This is where God dwells!*"³²⁵

After He was raised from the dead, His talmidim recalled what He had said. Then they trusted in the Scripture (John 2:22a CJB). As an expression, **the Scripture**, nearly always refers to a particular passage of **Scripture**. But, it is not easy to identify the passage in mind. It may be **Psalms 16:10**, which is interpreted as pointing to the resurrection in **Acts 2:31** and **13:35**. Or it may be **Isaiah 53:12**, which foreshadows the activity of **the Suffering Servant** after **His** death.

The apostles not only believed **the Scripture**, but also **the words that Yeshua had spoken (John 2:22b CJB)**. Notice that **they** didn't **believe the Scripture** until **they** saw it fulfilled. **Yeshua** often spoke in parables and **they** must have thought that this was another example of it. They probably thought, "Obviously **He** cannot mean rising from the dead in a literal sense. What, then, does **He** mean?" When the resurrection took place, however, **they** saw the meaning of **the words**, and as a result, **they trusted** in them. **Jesus** would later say: **But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you (John 14:26).**³²⁶

When we read the account of **Jesus** cleansing **the Temple**, we can be distracted by what seems to be fiery anger released against those who were using **His Father's house** for their own purposes. In fact, **Messiah** was performing a prophetic gesture in which **He** demonstrated **His** power and authority over the effects of spiritual darkness in our lives. The Bible reminds us that we are **a temple for the Ruach Ha'Kodesh (First Corinthians 6:19a CJB)**, and that we should **purify ourselves from everything that can defile either body or spirit (Second Corinthians 7:1a CJB)**. In **His** death and resurrection, **the Lord** opened the way for our cleansing and it is **the Spirit Himself** who personally accomplishes this - moment by moment - as we allow **Him** to take the steering wheel of our lives.

ADONAI says: **I AM a zealous God (Exodus 20:4-6)**. The reason that **idols** are not to be worshiped is that **the LORD** is a **jealous or zealous God**, and their idolatry is looked upon as spiritual adultery. The Hebrew term *qanna'* combines the two concepts of jealousy and **zeal** (not envy or suspicion). So **zeal**, or **zealousness**, meaning *a passionate devotion to*, would be a better term to use than **jealous**, which has negative, even petty connotations. So idolatry would cause **God's zeal** to burn like a husband's **zealousness** would burn against an unfaithful wife (**Hosea 2:2-5**). Because we are **the body of Christ (First Corinthians 12:27)**, **God** has a right to be **zealous** over what is rightfully **His**. Consequently, **Jesus'** actions that day in **the Temple**, and **the Holy Spirit's** actions now are not to be understood as petty jealousy, but righteous **zealousness**.



*Dear Heavenly **Father**, I thank **You** for **Your** presence in my life. Forgive me for the times I have lied as though that isn't a reality. I submit myself to **Your** building process in my life. I desire to be **a temple** that glorifies **God** in my body. I renounce the lie of Satan that **You** do not live in me. I accept by faith that I am **Your temple**, and I believe that there is nothing more significant than to reveal **Your** presence in my life. Teach me to take care of my **temple** properly and honor it as **Your** dwelling place. In **Yeshua's** precious name I pray. Amen.³²⁷*