

Jesus' First Cleansing of the Temple at the Passover

John 2: 13-22

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) Dinning 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 (see **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** (see **Mx - Overview of the Second Temple and Fortress Antonia**), the Royal Stoa (see **My - 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 (see **Mz - The Interior of the Royal Stoa**).

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 (see **Na2 - The Robinson's Arch Side View**). 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 (**Matthew 22:23; Mark 12:18; Luke 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 when you brought your 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**). Consequently, 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 Palestine, 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, **Yerushalayim** 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.

Now 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 (John 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 (Nehemiah 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** (John 2:19). First of all, 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 the TaNaKh (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 AD. 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 - **Stage 11: The Fifth Mockery: Jesus' First Three Hours on the Cross**). 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 Shechinah glory had departed in the days of Jeremiah (Ezekiel 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 the 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 Psalm 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 HaKodesh (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