

The Cleansing of the Temple

The first temple was built by Solomon mid-10th Century BC (1 Kings 6-7). It was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar II after the Siege of Jerusalem of 587 BCE. It was rebuilt by the exiles returning from Babylonia (Ezra 6-15) .

Herod undertook further re-construction of the temple in 19 BC. The temple was not complete at this time, but was fully completed in 66 AD. It was then destroyed by Emperor Titus in 70 A.D.

Jesus Presented in the Temple

Luke 2:22-40 (NIV)

²² When the time came for the purification rites required by the Law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord ²³ (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, “Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord”), ²⁴ and to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the Law of the Lord: “a pair of doves or two young pigeons.”

²⁵ Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. ²⁶ It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord’s Messiah. ²⁷ Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts. When the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the Law required, ²⁸ Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying:

²⁹ “Sovereign Lord, as you have promised,
you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation,

³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all
nations:

³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles,
and the glory of your people Israel.”

³³ The child’s father and mother marvelled at what was said about him. ³⁴ Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother: “This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, ³⁵ so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too.”

³⁶ There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, ³⁷ and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. ³⁸ Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

³⁹ When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee to their own town of Nazareth. ⁴⁰ And the child grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him.

The Boy Jesus at the Temple

Luke 2:41-51 (NIV)

⁴¹ Every year Jesus’ parents went to Jerusalem for the Festival of the Passover. ⁴² When he was twelve years old, they went up to the festival, according to the custom. ⁴³ After the festival was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. ⁴⁴ Thinking he was in their company, they travelled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. ⁴⁵ When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. ⁴⁶ After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. ⁴⁷ Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸ When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His

mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”

⁴⁹ “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”
⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he was saying to them.

⁵¹ Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man.

We know from the scene at Pentecost, in Acts 2, that many people thronged to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, the Feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of Pentecost (or, the Feast of Weeks).

Jews and proselytes would have to pay the half-shekel temple tax in the currency of the temple, and foreign money was unacceptable. They also had to offer their sacrifices, and for many of these travellers, the only solution was to buy a sacrificial animal in Jerusalem.

Each worshipper was allowed to bring to the temple an animal of his own selection. But in all likelihood it would not be approved. So to save trouble and disappointment, animals for sacrifice were bought in the outer court, which was called the court of the Gentiles. The dealers in cattle and sheep would be tempted to charge exorbitant prices for such animals. They would exploit the worshippers. The money-changers, sitting cross-legged behind their little coin-covered tables gave the worshipper half shekel coins in exchange for foreign currency. Every worshipper—women, slaves, and minors excepted—had to pay the annual temple tribute. With these conditions the Holy Temple, intended as a house of prayer for all people, had become a den of robbers.

Jesus Clears the Temple Courts John 2:13- 25 (NIV)

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.”

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.

²³ 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.

The temple was to be a “house of prayer for all nations” (Mark 11:17). The outer courts of the temple are the only places where Gentiles could worship. They are not allowed to pass beyond the outer courts, which are filled with oxen, lambs and doves. There is no place for the Gentiles to pray or worship. Can you imagine trying to pray in the midst of a stockyard, with all the noises of the animals and the bickering businessmen? Can you imagine trying to squeeze in between cattle who are tied up in the courts? Think of what it would be like to have to watch where you walked, lest you step in something

undesirable? It appears that Gentile worship is well and truly marginalised.

Mark 17:15

¹⁵ On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple courts and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the money changers and the benches of those selling doves, ¹⁶ and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts. ¹⁷ And as he taught them, he said, "Is it not written: 'My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations'? But you have made it 'a den of robbers.' "

¹⁸ The chief priests and the teachers of the law heard this and began looking for a way to kill him, for they feared him, because the whole crowd was amazed at his teaching.

What Jesus sees going on in the temple courts troubles Him greatly. The place of prayer has become a place of profit-taking. It sounds more like the trading floor of a Stock Exchange than the outer courts of the temple of God. It smells more like a barnyard than the place where one would seek God's presence.

Jesus enters the outer court of the temple, fashioning a whip from materials at hand (probably from the cords used to tie up the animals). He then drives them all out of the temple area. By the word "all," he drives out not only the animals, but also those who are selling them as well. The coins of the moneychangers are poured out and scattered on the ground and their tables overturned. To those selling the doves, Jesus says, "Take these things away from here! Do not make my Father's house a marketplace!"

Psalm 69:9

*"for zeal for your house consumes me,
and the insults of those who insult you fall on me.*

Psalm 69 is a psalm of David. It is a prayer for his deliverance, due to his piety. The psalm speaks of his imminent danger due to the enemies of God who hate him for his fervent devotion to God, and who seek his death. Later portions of this psalm depict events that occur at the crucifixion of Jesus.

Jesus acts out of zeal for His Father's house, laying claim to the temple and cleansing it in His Father's name.

In so doing, He fulfils a prophecy that our Lord's zeal for His Father's house will bring about His death.



The Collect

*Almighty and ever-living God,
clothed in majesty,
whose beloved Son was presented in the Temple,
in substance of our flesh:
grant that we may be presented to you
with pure and clean hearts,
by your Son Jesus Christ our Lord,
who is alive and reigns with you,
in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and for ever.*

The Grace

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
and the love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit
be with us all, now and evermore.
Amen.

(2 Corinthians 13:14 NIV)