





A Den of Thieves

Matthew 21:6,12-17
Mark 11:15-18; 13:2
Luke 19:44-48; 21:6
John 2:13-25

Life of Jesus

The story of Jesus cleansing the temple takes place in all four gospels. But it takes some research to fully understand the story and determine exactly what is happening.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all have record of Jesus cleansing the temple near the very end of his ministry, less than a week before his death. However, John also has a record of the cleansing of the temple at the very beginning of the ministry of Jesus, just days after his first miracle at Cana. Both times Jesus did this was near the week of Passover.

The incidents are so similar, why would Jesus do this twice, years apart? First we will look at *what* he did, and then we will look at *why*.

The first time Jesus did this was not very long after his ministry began.

What was the event that happened that launched the ministry of Jesus? His baptism by John the Baptist.

What was his first miracle? The water into wine at Cana. This took place shortly after his baptism.

Shortly after the wedding at Cana, Jesus went to Capernaum, and then on to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem it was near the time of Passover, and this is the next story we see of Jesus.

Jerusalem is the capital city, a large city. Everyone came to worship God in Jerusalem.

Where would they worship? At the temple.

Jesus went into the temple, and found that people were using for a marketplace, they were selling things. They had stalls set up, and were selling oxen, sheep, and doves, and the money changers were sitting and collecting money.

Discuss: They were selling oxen, sheep and doves.

What do we know about these animals? Do they stink?

Oxen are very large. Do oxen and sheep know where to use the toilet?

No. They would have dropped manure everywhere; they would have urinated all over the place. They would have made the temple a mess.

Jesus made a whip out of small cords, and drove them out of the temple.

Discuss: Where did that come from? What did he make it out of?

Where did he get the cords?

Maybe there were ropes there for the animals? Maybe he braided them together?

We aren't told.

He drove all of them out of the temple.





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Discuss: Do you know what a whip looks like? Do you know what a whip feels like? It has a whistle when it goes through the air, and it has a snap when it hits a target.

Jesus probably started snapping the whip towards the people, the sheep, the oxen, all of them, telling them, Get out of here! The people are running to get out of the way.

He dumped out the money changers' money; poured it on the floor and turned over the tables; he knocked them all down. They probably had the birds in cages sitting on the tables, and he knocked them over. The cages may have broken, and birds may have been flying around.

Is this a big deal? Yes. This would have made news. He tore up their marketplace, and made a whip and drove them out. They did not have television or radio, but we can guess that everyone heard about this.

Discuss: Why do you think they were selling goods there?

Were they selling these animals so people could buy them for sacrifice?

Then he said to the people that sold the doves, Take these things out of there and do not make my Father's house a house of merchandise. Maybe the people argued that they were selling them for sacrifices. But did Jesus think this was okay?

Then his disciples remembered that it was written, "The zeal of your house has eaten me up." Psalm 69:9

The Jews said to him, Can you tell us who gave you the authority to do this?

Jesus responded, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

They thought this was crazy. They said, It took forty-six years to build this temple, and you will build it again in three days?

But Jesus was talking about the temple of his body. When he was risen from the dead, the disciples remembered that he had said this and they believed the scriptures.

After this, he stayed in Jerusalem for the feast day, and he did many miracles. But he did not trust them, and he did not need their testimony of him.

The next time this happened it was mentioned in all three gospels. This time it happened the week before he was arrested, just days before he was crucified.

Jesus went into the temple and began casting out all of the people that were buying and selling in the temple.

Discuss: He told them a few years before to stop. But are they still here?

Did they just set up their stuff again after he left the first time?

It was the same scene, except there is no reference to a whip this time. He knocked over the tables of the money changers and he threw down the chairs of the people selling doves. The people and animals are running, gathering their things and trying to get out of the way. The birds may have been flying around. It was quite a sight to see.





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It is mentioned more than once that Jesus seemed to focus on those who were selling the doves. It could be because the dove sellers would be selling to the poorest people. The poor could not afford the larger sacrifices and would sacrifice a dove, or pigeon.

This was Passover week.

This was their largest annual opportunity to make money. Everyone came from all around, not only from surrounding cities, but many people would travel to Jerusalem at Passover. The people would have to have animals to offer for Passover sacrifice. It would be like a tourist attraction. The merchants knew where the people would be, and what they would be buying. The prices might have even been higher because they knew people needed these things.

Discuss: This would have made news. These people probably prepared for this sales event all year, and they may have relied on the money they made during this week to use throughout the year. Jesus shut it all down, and did not care about their financial opportunities. They were violating the temple of God.

Jesus said,

Isn't it written, "My house shall be called a house of prayer," (Isaiah 56:7) but you have made it a den of thieves. (Mark 11:17)

But then Jesus did something else. After he kicked everyone else out of the temple, the crippled and the blind people came to them, and he healed them. Isn't this what the temple is supposed to be for?

The priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that Jesus did, and the people that he healed. The children in the temple were loudly calling out in the temple, saying,

Hosanna to the Son of David!

When the priests saw that Jesus was healing all the people, were they happy for the people that got well? Absolutely not. They were very upset, and even more upset that the children were praising Jesus.

The word, "Hosanna," literally means, "Save us!" It is a cry for salvation. But it has a double meaning and also means "praise," or adoration.

The priests said to Jesus, "Do you hear what they are saying?" They were basically telling Jesus, You should not let them say these things to you. They should not be doing this. And they wanted Jesus to put a stop to it.

But Jesus said,

Have you never read, Out of the mouth of children and babies you have perfected praise? (Psalm 8:2; Matt 21:16)

What does this mean? What is Jesus talking about?

Jesus is talking about how children and babies praise him. Have you ever showed a baby how to lift its hands to the Lord? You can sing a song with a baby or a small child and show them how to lift their hands. They do it. They praise the Lord. And even though they may not really know seem to know what they are doing, Jesus is calling this "perfect praise." This means more than we can understand and it definitely means something to God. (Matthew 18:1-4)

The priests and scribes were very upset that the people admired Jesus.

They were looking for a way to destroy Jesus, but they were afraid of the people because everyone was amazed by him and he was so liked by the people. Jesus left, he went out of the city, and stayed in Bethany.





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What does all this mean? Why did Jesus tell everyone to get out of the temple, and why did he do it twice?

Discuss: What is a temple?

What is it for?

Let the students share their answers, and guide them to correct answers.

The temple was not always the temple. Before it was the temple, it was called something else. It was mobile, it was used in the wilderness. It was called the tabernacle. This was like a very large tent, that could be moved from one place to another.

Where did the Israelites get the idea to build this tabernacle?

Do you remember a very well known man who wrote five of the Old Testament books? This man was very famous in Egypt. He led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt.

He wrote the Ten Commandments: Moses.

Where did Moses get the idea to build the tabernacle? Where did he get the Ten Commandments? Moses went up on a mountain for forty days where God spoke to him. God gave him the Ten Commandments, and the plans for this tabernacle.

The temple.

The tabernacle.

Moses on the mountain.

All of these have a theme and are part of a picture that God was trying to illustrate.

But we have to go back even further. We have to go back to the very beginning.

When God first made the world, where did he put people? In the Garden of Eden. In this garden, who came and talked to them every day? Who came and walked with them? God.

He planned for the Garden of Eden to be the place where God would come and visit with his people. They would have a relationship and they would spend time together there. But the people messed up his plan, and they had to leave the garden.

Discuss: Why did God make them leave the garden?

They ate the fruit of the tree that they were not supposed to eat. What was that tree: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

But there was another tree in the middle of the garden. What was that tree? The Tree of Life.

Because they ate of the tree of knowledge of good and evil that brought in sin, there is now evil in the world. If they then eat of the Tree of Life, then they would live forever with sin and evil in the world.

(Genesis 3:22) God sent them out of the garden not for punishment, but for their protection. He did not want them to have access to the tree of life with sin.

At the very beginning, from the foundation of the world, God already had a plan for Jesus to come into the world to bring salvation. So he had to preserve this plan; but it was not yet time. (1 Peter 1:19-21; Revelation 13:8)

God had planned for the garden of Eden to be the place where God would communicate and fellowship with his people. But now they are not allowed in the garden anymore.





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Where can God meet his people?

After Moses led the people out of Egypt, God came to Moses and the people and wanted to have a relationship with them. But the people were scared of God so they told Moses to go talk to God for them. (Exodus 20:18-21) Moses went up on the mountain to talk to God. At that time the mountain was seen as a place where "heaven touched earth", and Moses talked to God on the mountain. God gave him the Ten Commandments and then 603 more laws.

God told Moses that he wanted to have a relationship with his people. He wanted to be with them, to be their God and live among them. (Exodus 25:8-9) So he told Moses to make him a tabernacle where God could live among them. But it had to be sacred, it had to be a holy place to protect them from his glory. God is so powerful, and his glory is like a "devouring fire." (Exodus 24:17)

God told Moses very specifically how to build this tabernacle where God would come down and meet with his people. He told him even what color to make the curtains and all the pieces.

It had three parts, or sections. It had an outside area, an inner area, and a smaller inside part called the "Holy of Holies," where God lives, and only the priest could go.

Years later, David told God he did not want God to live in a tent, and he wanted to build him a real temple of stone. God told David that Solomon would be the one to build this temple, and they built a beautiful temple for the Lord. And God came down into the temple, and this is where he met with the people.

We can see that the temple was very important to God. It was sacred. **It was where God and the people came together.**

With all of this background information, we can now go back and look at WHY Jesus cleansed the temple.

God gave many laws and rules to Moses, and one of the laws is about cleansing your house.

If your house got a disease in it, or a mold or mildew in it, you would tell the priest, First, they would take everything out of the house, and then the priest would come and look at your house and see what was wrong. (Leviticus 14:34-45)

Then they would close the door and shut the house up for seven days, and then he would come back again to inspect your house. If the disease had spread, they would clean the stones where the mold or mildew was, and replace them with new stones.

Later, if the plague returned after it was cleaned, after the stones were replaced, then the priest would come and inspect your house, and declare it unclean. Then the house would be torn down. This is the only way to get rid of it.

Jesus is the ultimate priest. (Hebrews 3:1; 4:14)

At the first of his ministry, Jesus examined the temple, and he cleansed it by removing everyone and everything.

Then again at the end of his ministry, he came back to see if they anything had changed. Was it still "diseased"?

Yes. Jesus examined the temple, and found that he needed to cleanse it again and he removed everyone and everything again. But he had already condemned it. In Luke, just before Jesus came in the temple to cleanse it again, he said that enemies would come in and they would not leave "one stone upon another." (Luke 19:42-44) This is exactly what happened in 70 AD when the Roman emperor laid siege on Jerusalem and the temple was completely destroyed.

Do you think that Jesus had probably been at the temple at times in between those two events? It is very likely. However, it was not yet time for him to perform the second cleansing. He specifically chose these times at the very beginning of his ministry, and again at the very end of his ministry to fulfill prophesy.



Jesus in the Story



Jesus IS the temple.

...the Word, (Jesus) was made flesh and dwells among us....full of grace and truth.

After Jesus cleansed the first time, he said **"Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up."** (John 2:19)

He was speaking of his body. (John 2:20-21) He was speaking of his death, and that he would rise in three days.

Up until Jesus, God had to have a way to communicate with his people, and this is why Moses met God on a mountains, they built the tabernacle, and later the temple.

God's desire was always to have a relationship with man, but in the Old Testament it was limited. There were people that the "Spirit of the Lord" came upon, but it would come and go, and only a few people, such as King David, did the Spirit stay.

When Jesus came to earth, the Spirit of God came on him at his baptism, and it stayed.

We no longer need a physical temple. We do not need a place where heaven touches earth, because God IS on earth through Jesus. Before Jesus came, God needed a physical temple, a place to connect with his people. But once Jesus came into the earth, God could be here through Jesus, His son.

Jesus ascended after he rose again, and he is now seated in heaven at the right hand of the Father. (Colossians 3:1)

If Jesus is not physically in the earth now, how is he here?

He is here through the Holy Spirit. Where is the Holy Spirit? It lives in us.

So who is the temple now? We are. **We are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God lives in us.** (1 Corinthians 3:16).

You are a living stones. (1 Peter 2:5)

Discuss: What does that mean?

There is no longer a physical temple on the earth, but is made up of people. As believers, we make up the temple.

Peter said that we are living stones, living rocks. Just like the temple was made of stones, we are now the stones in the temple.

Jesus is the "cornerstone" and we are built upon him. (Luke 20:17; Ephesians 2:20)

When you build, you have to start somewhere. One stone is carefully measured and laid down on the foundation. All the other stones go out from that one stone because you know it is straight, and it is in the right place.

That is who Jesus is, and we are the stones built on the foundation of Jesus.

We are the body of Christ on earth. The things that Jesus does on this earth are done through his people. Jesus is not physically bringing food to people, that is our job. If someone needs help, we are the body of Jesus on the earth and it is our job to do the things that Jesus wants done. (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)

So how does God meet with us and talk with us now?

He talks to you. Because you have the Spirit of God living on the inside of you, it's like a private line directly going from you to God. You no longer have to go through a priest, we have Jesus, the ultimate priest. He has also made us priests so that we can bring Jesus to others. (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 5:10)





Lesson Questions & Memory Verses

1. My Beloved Son

1. What opened when Jesus was baptized?
2. What did God send to Jesus, and how did it appear?
3. Where did the voice come from?
4. What did the voice say?

Matthew 3:16-17

When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and alighting upon him. And suddenly a voice came from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

2. Into the Wilderness

1. What three things did Satan use to tempt Jesus?
2. 1 John 2:16 lists different types of sin and temptations in the world. What three basic things are the beginning of all sin and temptation?

1 Samuel 12:24

Only fear the Lord, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you.

3. A Wedding Invitation

Read John 4:45-46

1. Where did Jesus go?
2. What happened the last time Jesus was here?
3. Why were these people looking for Jesus?
4. How did they know about him?

Isaiah 43:19

Behold, I will do a new thing; now it shall spring forth; shall you not know it? I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.

4. A Den of Thieves

Read Matthew 21:12-17

1. How many times did Jesus cleanse the temple?
2. What were the people doing in the temple?
3. What did Jesus say the temple is supposed to be?
4. What did Jesus do in the temple instead?

1 Corinthians 3:16; 1 Peter 2:5

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? You also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

