

The Church of the Servant King

Survey of the Bible Series – The Gospel of John (SB_JN2B_Jesus Cleanses the Temple & Demonstrates Wisdom)

Background Information on the Temple

During Israel's history, there have been three Temple structures, each of which have been destroyed. All were built upon the same site and after the same general pattern set by the first, i.e. Solomon's Temple. I shall provide a brief overview of these three Temples in the following points:

- **Solomon's Temple** – King David, inspired by the Holy Spirit, first mentioned the need to replace the Tabernacle with a permanent structure (1 Chron 28:12, 19) after David had secured the peace through the conquest of Israel's enemies (2 Sam 7:1-13; 1 Chron 17:1-14; 28:1-19). However, David was forbidden to build the Temple due to the fact that he had shed so much blood in war (1 Chron 22:8). Nevertheless, David began to collect the materials and make arrangements for the task to be completed by his son, Solomon. Solomon's reign was a reign of peace and prosperity for Israel such that Israel had never seen before or since (2 Sam 7:9-13; 1 Ki 5:3-4; 1 Chron 22:7-10). The construction of this Temple began in the fourth year of Solomon's reign (ca 960 B.C.) and ended in the eleventh year of Solomon's reign (ca. 953 B.C.). Therefore, its construction took about seven and a half years. Solomon's temple was destroyed by the Chaldeans who burned the Temple to the ground after pillaging it of its valuables in 586 B.C.¹
- **Zerubbabel's Temple** – This temple was erected after Israel's return from Babylonian captivity. Construction on the Temple probably began circa 520 B.C. Some of the people began to return from Babylonian captivity as early as 538 B.C. and they planned to build a new temple in Jerusalem. However, they succumbed to the pressure of their enemies who did not want to see a restored Israel in the land. They became spiritually lethargic and focused upon building beautiful homes for themselves. The prophet Haggai, whose ministry to Israel spanned a period of only four months in 520 B.C. confronted the Jews about their spiritual lethargy which was symbolized by their lack of focus upon the symbol of Israel's meeting place with the living God. Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest responded quickly to Haggai's message and three week's after Haggai's first message, they began their work on the Temple. The prophet Zechariah began his ministry just two months after Haggai and his ministry and prophecies continued until 518 B.C. The temple was completed circa 516-515 B.C., a period of seventy years after its destruction in 586 B.C. This temple was plundered by Antiochus Epiphanes, who also defiled it with idolatrous practices. It was restored by Judas Maccabeus during the Maccabean era of the second century B.C. It was taken by Pompey (106 – 48 B.C.) of the Roman Empire after a three month siege and later by Herod the Great.²
- **Herod's Temple** – This temple was a reconstruction of the temple built by Israel under Zerubbabel. Some do not classify this temple structure as a third temple; however, it was such a massive project that for all intents and purposes it was. Construction was begun circa 20 B.C. and was not concluded until the mid 60's A.D. Herod's project included an extra court not present in the earlier temples, i.e. an outer court of the Gentiles. This temple was built as much as a means of appeasement to the contentious Jews as it was a monument to Herod's ego.

Jesus Cleanses the Temple (2:13-22)

¹ Many sources document the history of the three temple structures in Israel's history. One source used for this brief introduction is Merrill Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), 1258-1264.

² Ibid., 1262.

Evidently, there were two cleansings of the Temple by Jesus during His public ministry – one at the beginning of His ministry (our passage) and one at the end of His public ministry (Matt 21:12-17; Mk 1:15-19; Lu 19:45-48). John was most likely very aware of the Synoptic accounts by the time he penned his Gospel. The Synoptic Gospels include only the cleansing of the Temple which occurred late in Jesus' ministry and position it almost immediately after Palm Sunday.

The language of the Synoptic gospels differs slightly from John's account. In addition to the fact that John's Gospel positions Jesus' cleansing of the Temple early in Jesus' ministry, there are a few other slight differences between John's account and the Synoptic writers. A brief comparison of the similarities and differences follows:

- ❑ The first cleansing recorded by John seems to catch people by surprise and the second cleansing recorded in the Synoptic Gospels was one of the immediate causes of Jesus' death.
- ❑ Only John mentions that Jesus made a whip of cords (2:15)
- ❑ John is more specific regarding whom Jesus drove out of the Temple, i.e. the money changers, sheep & oxen, and to whom Jesus spoke, i.e. those who sold doves (2:14-16)
- ❑ Only John records that the Jews ask for a sign (2:18)
- ❑ Only John records Jesus' statement – "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up" (2:19). Of the synoptic writers, only Matthew's Gospel includes allusions to this statement by Jesus' accusers (Matt 26:61; 27:40), but there is no direct quote of Jesus.
- ❑ In the second cleansing of the Temple toward the end of Jesus' ministry, Jesus' attack was sharper – He called the Temple area in which the money-changers had been operating a "den of robbers" (Lk 19:46).
- ❑ Matthew's Gospel mentions that Jesus heals the blind and lame who come to Him in the Temple after He drives out the money changers (Matt 21:14). John does not mention this. Both Mark and Luke mention that Jesus taught them afterward (Mk 11:17; Lk 19:47).
- ❑ Mark adds that Jesus would not allow anyone to carry wares through the Temple (Mk 11:16).

The money changers and sellers of sacrificial animals were probably operating in area of the Court of the Gentiles, which surrounded the actual Temple. The buying and selling of animals which were needed to satisfy the requirements of the Mosaic Law was for the purpose of assisting pilgrims to Jerusalem who either did not have an animal or who might have lost their sacrificial animal on the way. This presented a great opportunity for the unscrupulous to exploit the situation and charge exorbitant fees for the animals and exchange fees for converting the pilgrim's money to local coinage.

It is important to note that Jesus did not attack the sacrificial system itself. Rather, He attacked those who corrupted a system designed to have spiritual value into a system of personal enrichment. What does this say about those today and in every era who distort God's means of spiritual sustenance into a mechanism of personal profit?

John adds a reflective comment in verse 17 and quotes Psalm 69:6 – "Zeal for your house has eaten me up." This is inserted as a reference to the fact that Jesus' zeal for God the Father would ultimately lead to His death. It took the hindsight of the Resurrection for all of Jesus' disciples to realize the significance of Jesus' profound statements.

Jesus Demonstrates Wise Discretion (2:23-25)

Jesus performed other miracles and taught while He was in Jerusalem. Many believed or trusted in Him (2:24); however, Jesus did not believe (same Greek word used as in v. 23) or commit Himself to them. The principle is that Jesus knew how fickle the faith and life of a new believer can be, especially one who believes based upon a miracle. There were plenty of examples of this throughout Israel's history (e.g. Moses' generation) and in Jesus' experience to

have taught Him that lesson. Jesus knew that such faith would not sustain these people to endure the pressure they would encounter should Jesus choose to turn Himself over to their care. The concerns of everyday life would quickly cause them to forget the lessons they had just learned. Can you imagine what would have happened had Jesus turned Himself over to their care? In a matter of days or even hours, these same people would be complaining about every single adversity they faced and wondering why Jesus didn't immediately solve it with a miracle. Even though God is omnipotent enough to accomplish such relief, such a pattern of life was not in the plan of the Father for Jesus while He ministered as a human on earth. Also, such a pattern of life (i.e. living from miracle to miracle) would not have resulted in the faith necessary to create the humility required to support the establishment of the kingdom on this earth.