

John Lesson # 4 Articles

Whereas the other Gospels have the cleansing of the temple story at the end of Jesus' ministry, John has the incident happening at the beginning. Why? The answer may be related to John's keenness to develop his theme of Jesus being new direct access to God. He has shown us a Jesus who has commanded the respect and devotion of John the Baptist, who pointed to him as the one who takes away sin. We have seen that Jesus has disclosed something of his 'glory' in that he has transformed the water of the old covenant into the wine of the new covenant. He can now be seen to replace the need for a temple.

This Jewish temple, as re-built under Herod the Great, was one of the wonders of the ancient world. Recent archaeological excavations are showing the extent of these huge buildings before their destruction in AD 70. For the Jewish nation, the temple was the focus of their devotion and the place where God had caused 'his name to dwell'. The concept of a God who pitched his tent with his people in the wilderness was formalized by the building of this more permanent house of God by King Solomon. Although the temple had been destroyed and rebuilt several times, it still had a powerful hold on the Jewish imagination. It is a great credit to Judaism that the Jewish faith survived the destruction of this shrine.

Jesus, in taking a 'whip hand' to all that clutters and clatters in the temple precinct, is not just demonstrating his abhorrence of commercialism. He is condemning a system that complicates access to God. The 'Jews' now appear on the scene for the first time, demanding a sign. (We are reminded of the question asked of Jesus by the chief priests: 'By what authority do you do these things?'—Matthew 21:23.) The only sign that Jesus gives is the passion, the destruction of his body and its raising up in three days. Jesus is the new temple, the focus of God where God has caused his name to dwell. He is the new Bethel ('House of God'), he is the 'Son of Man', the open door to heaven where angels ascend and descend (1:51). As yet the disciples do not fully understand these things. Those who do respond do so for the wrong motives (v. 25). After the resurrection when Jesus is fully glorified, they will make the connections that John has made in this narrative.¹

2:17 — *Then His disciples remembered that it was written, "Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up."*

The disciples would not have been able to remember this text (Ps. 69:9) if they were not already familiar with it. For God to use His Word to encourage and instruct us, we have to spend time in it.

2:22 — ... when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said.

Sometimes we hesitate to spend time in God's Word because we don't feel as though we're getting anything out of it. But often a text does not "click" in our minds until some time later.²

Now that Jesus had demonstrated that He is God's anointed Savior to the small group of men who had believed in Him, He next made this claim to mankind in general. He chose Passover for this as devout Jews from all over the world, from both their homeland and those Gentile lands in which Jews had settled after the exile, packed Jerusalem at Passover time. Furthermore, Passover provided Jesus with a dramatic occasion to make His claim at the focal point of the national attention, the temple, and He did it in a way calculated to draw the attention of not only the hierarchy, but the common populace as well. (Can you imagine a storekeeper from Cana arriving to buy a sacrificial lamb and finding the place in disarray and not at all in the customary bustle that preceded Passover? Assuredly he would want to know what had happened, and certainly someone would tell him!) In a short while all Jerusalem would have known what had happened. This was the most effective means imaginable of publicizing Jesus' claims to the largest possible number of people.³

¹ McFadyen, P. (1998). *Open Door on John: a gospel for our time* (pp. 13–14). London: Triangle.

² Stanley, C. F. (2005). *The Charles F. Stanley life principles Bible: New King James Version* (Jn 2:17–22). Nashville, TN: Nelson Bibles.

³ Mills, M. S. (1999). *The Life of Christ: A Study Guide to the Gospel Record* (Jn 2:13–22). Dallas, TX: 3E Ministries.