

JESUS, ISRAEL & PROPHECY

Week 10 –The Cleansing of the Temple

John 2:13-25

The story continues. . . .

The Passover of the Jews was at hand/was near. And, Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Dt. 16:16 – God required Jewish males to appear in the place He chose (II Chron. 6:6 – Jerusalem) three times each year: Feast of Passover/Unleavened Bread, Feast of Pentecost (Shavuot), and Feast of Tabernacles. Jerusalem was BULGING with Jews at those three feasts. Jewish males traveled up to the city not only from all the cities in Galilee and Judea but also from all over the world. In speaking of the Feast of Pentecost, Acts 2:5 tells us that there were Jews from every nation under heaven gathered in Jerusalem. Plus, if the Jewish males had to appear before God in Jerusalem, most likely many of them brought their families along (Luke 2:41). Jerusalem EXPLODED with people during these three feasts.

God required all Jewish males to appear before Him at Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles each year. Consider:

Passover – Each year Jewish men had to travel to Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover. And then. . . during one Passover (between 29 AD and 32 AD), on THE day of Passover, what did all the Jewish men witness? A man hanging on a cross for six hours, for three hours there was darkness over all the land, the veil of the Temple was torn in two (Josephus wrote that the veil was 60’ high and the 4” thick – made of twisted linen – very dense) – that massive veil was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and graves were opened! Two + million Jewish people were in Jerusalem to witness God’s greatest gift to the world! Three days following Passover, on the Jewish feast of First Fruits, the TOMB WAS EMPTY! On the Jewish feast of First Fruits, the barley crop was harvested. At the first pinpoint of light on that morning FOLLOWING the Sabbath – on that SUNDAY morning - the priest went into the Kidron Valley and looked for the first stalk of grain. Jesus told His disciples in John 12:23-24 – “I tell you that unless a grain falls to the ground and dies, it stays just as a grain; but if it dies – it produces a great harvest.” I Cor. 15:20 says, “But now is Messiah risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept.” Who is the “great harvest”? Because Jesus rose – we who are believers in Him are guaranteed eternal life.

Pentecost (Shavuot) – a Jewish feast in which Jews celebrated the giving of the law at Shavuot. “Shavuot” means weeks. It occurred on the 50th day following 7 weeks after the Feast of First Fruits. “Pentecost” is Greek for “50” – the 50th day after 7 weeks. . . . At Pentecost the Holy Spirit descended and indwelled “about 3,000” (Acts 2:41). The Church was born. The children of Israel were there to view the birth of the body of the Messiah – the Church (Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus). They were in Jerusalem to hear Peter’s powerful message spoken in their own language! (Read Ex. 33:19-28; note how many died in v. 28; read Acts 2:41)

Tabernacles – celebrated the promise that God would dwell with man. The Messiah would rule and reign in Jerusalem. Jesus will return to Jerusalem at His Second Coming on the Feast of Tabernacles!

There was a definite reason that God required the Jewish males to go up to Jerusalem each year on those specific feasts!

Jesus went up to Jerusalem at Passover . . . At Passover roads and bridges were repaired to accommodate the millions of pilgrims going up to Jerusalem. Sepulchers/graves were whitewashed. The reason for this was to prevent the possibility of a person coming in contact with a grave – with a dead body - and becoming ceremonially defiled – thus becoming disqualified from participation in the Passover. The pilgrims traveled UP to Jerusalem singing the songs of Ascent – Psa. 120 through Psa. 134 (read Psa. 122:1-5).

Jewish people traveled to Jerusalem from all over the known world. Upon seeing Jerusalem, which God calls the “joy of the whole earth” in Psa. 48:2, they realized that no city compared. God has placed His name in Jerusalem (II Chron. 6:6).

Jerusalem – was an ancient city – a THRESHING FLOOR that King David purchased for the purpose of building an altar upon that site – to sacrifice for his sin of numbering the people of Israel (I Chron. 21). Jerusalem is a city that has been continually battle torn. It has exchanged hands numerous times. God tells us in Zechariah 12 that He will make Jerusalem a cup of trembling for those nations surrounding Jerusalem. The nations surrounding will become intoxicated because of Jerusalem; they will not know how to process what is going on with this little city in this small seemingly inconsequential country. God tells us in Isa. 62:7 that He is going to make Jerusalem a praise in the earth. . . because it is to Jerusalem that Jesus will return and set up His 1,000 year reign over the earth!

So Jesus goes up to Jerusalem. He had been to Jerusalem many times during the years prior to His public ministry, having been required to do so as a Jewish male. BUT NOW, He is going up to the city – having been announced to the world as THE MESSIAH! And, He will fulfill Malachi’s prophecy about the Messiah, “*The Lord Whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming, says the LORD of hosts.*” (Mal. 3:1)

Jesus entered the Temple complex. . . .

- The Court of the Gentiles lay on 4 sides of the inner Temple enclosure – and it was so named because Gentiles were allowed only in this area of the Temple. It was here that the money changers and those who sold sacrificial animals set up their tables and stalls.
- Surrounding the Temple was a low wall called the Soreg. It stood approx. 5’ and it served as a boundary. Beyond this point, entry was permitted only to Jewish people who were not impure through exposure to death. The Soreg was topped at

intervals by notices on stone tablets written in Greek and Latin that warned Gentiles, specifically, not to proceed farther. If Gentiles did go beyond the Soreg, they risked death.

- Great Altar – 15’ high; there was a platform running around all 4 sides of the altar. A funnel carried the blood of the sacrifices and conducted the blood into a channel that emptied the blood into the Kidron Valley.
- Near the altar were several stone tables; near the tables were tethering rings fastened to the floor. Animals were tied – they were tethered - as they awaited slaughter.
- Tables were used for preparation of the carcasses.

. . . and what Jesus saw sickened Him. Worship was not occurring in the Court of the Gentiles. The Court of the Gentiles had been turned into the Bazaar of the Sons of Annas (the High Priest) with the moneychangers, etc. Every Jewish male had to pay a temple tax at the Temple. At Passover every Jewish male was required to pay a half-shekel tax (two days’ wage) (Ex. 30:13) in the form of a special Temple coin – not in Roman or Greek coinage. Thus the moneychangers were set-up within the Temple courts to exchange the foreign coins into the appropriate coinage. There was an exorbitant price levied for this exchange of the foreign coins – sometimes almost as much as half of the value of the money being exchanged. Furthermore, a sacrifice offered had to be made with an animal without blemish. The children of Israel could purchase an animal within the Temple court. However, if they brought an animal of their own to the Temple, those animals had to be examined by the priests. If the animal was found to be blemished, the worshipper had to purchase an animal from the “Temple herd” at a tremendously inflated price. God’s intent was that the Temple serve as a house of prayer for all people. The Temple had become a den of robbers/thieves (Jer. 7:11). The money changing had been taking place in the Court of the Gentiles! God had called the Jewish people to serve as witnesses to the nations of the one true God (Isa. 43:10). What kind of witness was this?

The place of prayer had become a place of profit-taking. Jesus entered the outer court of the Temple, the Court of the Gentiles, and fashioning a whip, He drove them all out of the Temple area. It appears that “all” includes animals and people. The animals included the lambs for Passover! Prophetic? Here was Jesus, the Perfect Passover Lamb. There would soon be no need for sacrificing animal Passover lambs. Jesus poured out the coins of the moneychangers and overturned the tables. Jesus exhibited righteous anger over the corrupt Temple practices. He said to those who sold doves (alternate sacrifices for those who could not afford lambs), “Take these things away! Do not make MY Father’s house a house of merchandise!” Jesus claimed to be the Son of God! His disciples then remembered what was written in Psalm 69:9 – “Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.”

Jesus not only came with God’s authority, He came as God. He is God tabernacling with among men (John 1:14) at His first coming.

NOTE: Matthew, Mark, and Luke record that Jesus cleansed the Temple at the end of His ministry directly before His betrayal and crucifixion. There were two cleansings of the Temple. Jesus cleansed the Temple both at the beginning (as seen in John) and at the end of His ministry.

How does this speak to us? How are we worshipping God? Jesus told the woman at the well in John 4:24, “God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.” Our worship must be with the proper heart attitude and must be according to the truth revealed about God in His word.

Are we defending God’s honor, His holiness? God didn’t allow Moses into the Promised Land because Moses disobeyed God – He didn’t “hallow” God – present God as holy – before the people (Dt. 32:48-51).

Lev. 10:3 – “By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people, I must be glorified.”

Are we focused on the holiness of God? If so – how is God changing us day-by-day? How do I view my sin? AND, am I directing people to Jesus? Are people seeing – JESUS? GOD must be glorified!

What does Passover commemorate? The Passover celebration commemorates the physical deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt – when the death angel passed over every home where the blood of the slain Passover lamb was applied – in obedience to God - to the two door posts and lintel (Ex. 12:7). Passover was a physical demonstration of a spiritual truth – it looked forward to redemption through the Messiah Who would be the perfect Passover Lamb (Gen. 22:8; I Cor. 5:7). Everything about Passover pointed to Jesus - His blood was shed on the cross for us; the unleavened bread that is eaten at Passover points to His sinless life. At Passover it was commanded by God that leaven be removed from homes – that sin be purged! Jesus purged the Temple. . . .at Passover!

Why was the Temple called – “. . . a house of prayer for all nations” – Mark 11:17 (Isa. 56:7; Jer. 7:11)? God chose the Jewish people to be God’s witnesses to the world. (Isa. 43:10; II Sam. 22:50; I Chron. 16: 8, 23-24; Psa. 96). By God’s mighty acts on behalf of Israel – the world would know about the one true God (I Sam 17:46). And here we find the Jewish people setting up a marketplace – exacting huge amounts of money from people – in the COURT OF THE GENTILES within the Temple that was intended to be a place of prayer for ALL NATIONS (Mark 11:15-17). Do you think Jesus has the right to express righteous anger?

At Passover every Jewish household spent time meticulously going through their house, seeking out leaven – yeast – which could cause fermentation. Leaven is a symbol of sin (I Cor. 5:6-8). Leaven expands, it spreads, it permeates (influences). In Scripture it is primarily used in a negative sense. Jesus warns against the “leaven of the Pharisees” (Luke 12:1). In John 11:55 we read that many went up (to Jerusalem) prior to the Passover to purify themselves. This was an absolute necessity in order to properly celebrate the Passover. Yet, in a city that was given over to cleansing, when Jesus came into the temple, the house of God, He found it corrupted!

Throughout the Gospels we see so plainly how anyone can come to Jesus – no matter his/her background, no matter how far they've gone. In this cleansing of the Temple are we seeing that when we trust in Jesus for our salvation, He is not going to leave us the way we are? He is not going to settle for clutter, compromise, whatever may be defiling the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The text tells us that “the Jews” (perhaps the Temple authorities or representatives of the Sanhedrin (1:19) said to Jesus, “What sign do You show us, since You do these things?” Jesus' actions are the sign. God spoke through Malachi to the Jewish people: “Behold, I send My messenger, and He will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple. . . . But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire and like launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver. He will purify the sons of Levi, and PURGE them as gold and silver that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness” (Malachi 3:1-3)!!!!

Jesus speaks to them of the ultimate sign: “Destroy this temple, and in 3 days I will raise it up” (John 2:19). He spoke of His death and resurrection. That was His authority. He was telling them that He is GOD! The Jewish leadership did not understand – they were thinking in the most literal terms. They assumed that Jesus was speaking of Herod's temple being destroyed and then raised up. Should the Jews have known about the Messiah's resurrection in the OT? Psalm 16:10; Isa. 53:10. Even the disciples didn't grasp Jesus' death and resurrection until after Jesus' resurrection. They didn't realize that Jesus had come to die. They were expecting a conquering King who would overthrow Rome. They were riveted on their agenda? They were self-focused.

The cleansing in John 2 occurred at the beginning of Jesus' public ministry. Before He shared with the people His message of love, He illustrated in a most graphic way why they needed to hear His message of love. He demonstrated in such a visible way that they were needy; they were separated from God because they were sinners! They needed to see that they were sinners – thus the purging/cleansing.

Cleansing the temple – speaks to the holiness of God. Let's examine our lives as we seek to live HOLY UNTO THE LORD.

Questions:

Has God revealed His glory to you? How?

Suggested Homework:

Check out the four Gospels re: when Jesus rose.

Compare Ex. 32:28 and Acts 2:41

Journal how you are living “holy unto the Lord.”