

Exegetical Notes, Mark 11:15-18
“Cleaning the Temple”

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Mark 11:15-18

Verse 15-16

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area 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, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts.

- On the day after his arrival at the house of Lazarus in Bethany, Jesus went into Jerusalem. Late in the day, he entered the Temple. He looked around at what was happening there, but because it was late, he returned to Bethany. The twelve apostles were with him. See verse 11.
- The next day, Jesus returned to Jerusalem and went directly to the Temple. Once there, he violently challenged several practices.
 1. He “drove out those who were buying and selling there.” It was the practice to bring animals suitable for sacrifice to the outer court of the Temple and to offer these animals for sale to those who came to the Temple to offer sacrifice. This was originally done as a convenience to those who wanted to offer sacrifice. However, over time, the trade in sacrificial animals became a lucrative business for those who sold the animals. They charged more than the animals were worth and so cheated the people.
 2. He “overturned the tables of the money changers.” Roman coins bore the image of Roman emperors and gods. These “graven images” made these coins unacceptable to Jews as the ten commandments forbid the making of such images. Such coins could not be used to give an offering in the Temple. So they had to be exchanged for temple money. The problem was that those who exchanged the coins were charging the people unfairly to do so.

3. He “overturned the benches of those selling doves.” Doves were the cheapest of sacrificial animals. They were the only animals that poor people could afford to bring as a sacrifice. Again, those who sold them to poor people in the Temple were charging unfairly for them.
4. He “would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the Temple courts.” The Temple was a very large building situated in the center of the city. It was a long way around it. People cut through the temple as a short cut. Jesus would not allow them to do so.

Verse 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.’”

- In his teachings that day, Jesus used two passages to explain his actions, Isaiah 56:7 and Jeremiah 7:11. He accused the Jewish leaders of perverting the purpose of the Temple and of using it to cheat people.

Verse 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.

- Jesus’ action in the Temple and his words of teaching angered the leaders of Judaism because he had challenged their authority and shut down their money-making schemes. They were afraid of him, because the people were listening to him and agreeing with his teachings and his actions. Their resolve is to break their own law and kill him.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *The Days of the Passion: Cleaning the Temple*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by Dr. Jensen and Cornerstone Fellowship.)