
The Ministry of Christ In Judea

The Cleansing of the Temple (1)

Introduction

One of the questions that invariably comes to the fore whenever studying the book of John is: How many times did Jesus visit Jerusalem during His ministry? And when one attempts to reconcile John's gospel with the Synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), the task becomes somewhat problematic. In the pursuit of the answer, however, the Law of Moses is often not consulted, though it is a major resource for us.

According to Deut. 16:16ff, there were three times each year when the males must appear before Jehovah "...in the place which He chooses" (which, since David's time, was Jerusalem): Passover, Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), and the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths). If one calculates that Jesus would make the trip to Jerusalem twice per year, staying there through the 2 Spring feasts (Passover & Pentecost) and then went again in the fall feasts (Lev. 23) which would include the Tabernacles, then He would have visited Jerusalem a minimum of 7 times over a 3 ½ year period, unless one or more of His visits there lasted more than six months each. But in addition to these feasts prescribed by the Law, He also appears in John's account at the feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) in the winter (John 10:22).

Questions

1. *What was being sold in the temple and why? (A principle of Law in consideration of travel distance may have a bearing on this. See Duet. 14:22–26 and Ex. 12:1–3 before you answer).*
2. *What made Jesus angry? (You may find it helpful to compare this cleansing of the temple with the similar repetition of it at the end of Jesus' ministry: Matt. 21:12–13; Mk. 11:15–17 and Lk 19:45–46)*
3. *What passage of scripture came to the remembrance of the disciples? What does that passage have to do with Jesus?*
4. *Why didn't they arrest Him?*

Under the Iceberg: The language of the Spirit (1)

Literal or figurative—Physical or spiritual?

This is the first of many sayings of Jesus that were misunderstood, not only by the enemies of Jesus, but often by His own disciples as well (as in this case).

Two different words for “temple” come into the picture here. There are more words than one which can be used to describe the temple: House, Temple, Sanctuary, etc. This is true also in the Greek and in Hebrew. In the Greek, the word used for the physical structure is *heiros*, but that word can *only* mean the physical structure. On the other hand, the word for sanctuary is *naos*, and sometimes it can refer either to the physical structure or its spiritual nature. It is in this latter sense that the scriptures speak both of Christ’s body (here in John 2:21) and of a Christian’s body as a “temple (*naos*) of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 6:19). This is much like our words “church” and “assembly;” the word *church* can be used of the physical structure, or the human membership. On the other hand, the word *assembly* can only refer to the people. In the same way, the word *synagogue* is used in a dual sense in the scriptures. In Luke 4:16, Jesus enters the synagogue at Nazareth; in vs. 20, “...the eyes of all the synagogue” were upon Him. Compare also Luke 7:5 (“He built our synagogue”) and its usage in James 2:2.

Had He wished to do so, Jesus could have used a word which *only* referred to the physical structure, but instead He used a word which could refer to either. This is a key point in understanding the “language of the Spirit.” Most of the Messianic prophecies and much of Jesus’ teachings are crafted in this manner. In our previous lesson on the miracles of Jesus, we saw how Matthew used this “duality” to connect the spiritual healing of Isaiah 53 with the physical miracles of Jesus (Matt. 8:16–17).

Many people are still awaiting the appearance of the kingdom of God, because they interpret the kingdom prophecies of the Old Testament as being physical. For example, many Bible-believers are still awaiting the fulfillment of Isaiah 2:4 because there has never yet been a physical fulfillment of it. Yet we do see a spiritual fulfillment of it described quite specifically in Ephesians 2:11–22.

You might think that the way one interprets prophecy makes little difference to a his salvation, and to a certain extent that might be true. However, the Jews of Jesus’ time expected a physical kingdom as well, because they too interpreted these passages in much the same way as modern-day Premillennialists interpret them. As a result, their expectations of the Messianic prophecies blinded them to the truths which Jesus spoke by the Spirit, which misinterpretation contributed to His crucifixion.