

12. What reaction did Jesus provoke in the city of Jerusalem upon His arrival? How did people respond to those who asked what was going on? What did they mean?
13. After the Messianic entry into Jerusalem's Temple, what did Jesus do next, according to Mark? What time of day was it when the procession was finished?
14. List the separate facts in the incident that indicate that Jesus was not merely yielding to the wrong-headed Messianic enthusiasm of the people, but rather deliberately taking the initiative and proceeding according to His own spiritual program.
15. List the separate, new facts that Mark, Luke and John add to our total information about this event.

SECTION 55

JESUS CLEANSSES THE TEMPLE A LAST TIME AND RECEIVES WORSHIP OF CHILDREN

(Parallels: Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-48)

TEXT: 21:12-17

12 And Jesus entered into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold the doves; 13 and he saith unto them, It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer: but ye make it a den of robbers.

14 And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple; and he healed them. 15 But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children that were crying in the temple and saying, Hosanna to the son of David; they were moved with indignation, 16 and said unto him, Hearest thou what these are saying?

And Jesus saith unto them, Yea: did ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?

17 And he left them, and went forth out of the city to Bethany, and lodged there.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. In your opinion, why should Jesus have felt it necessary to purify the temple at this historic moment and in this particular way?

- b. Matthew, Mark and Luke record this purification at the end of Jesus' ministry, while John records a similar cleansing at the very beginning (John 2:13-22). Do you think these are separate events, and if so, on what basis do you think so? If not, why not?
- c. If you believe that John and the Synoptics record two separate cleansings, what reason would you assign to Jesus' desire to cleanse the temple both at the beginning and at the end of His ministry? If, as we learn from John, He attended a number of feasts in Jerusalem at which people would be changing money and sacrificing, and the merchants would presumably be needed for the same reasons as before and probably in the same places, is it likely that Jesus could have said or done nothing about their presence every time He came? Or is it simpler to assume that the merchants did not return until His last Passover?
- d. Why were the merchants in the Temple anyway? What was so wrong with what they were doing?
- e. Why should the chief priests and scribes have been so disturbed when Jesus purified the Temple? Should not they have been in agreement with Him that such a purification needed to be done?
- f. In your opinion, does not this rather violent demonstration of the spirit of Jesus compromise and sacrifice the spiritual character of His mission?
- g. In what sense are the miracles Jesus worked after the temple cleansing especially appropriate? Or is there any moral connection between the two events?
- h. Matthew does not cite the entire prophecy, as does Mark: "My house shall be called a house of prayer *for all the nations*" (Mark 11:17). Why do you think Matthew left out this latter part which places a definite emphasis on Gentiles?
- i. To what, specifically, does Jesus apply the words "den of robbers"?
- j. If Jesus objects to men's use of the temple of God as a market, on what basis can He justify His turning it into a HOSPITAL? What, if any, is the difference between what the merchants did to the temple, and what Jesus did to it by healing people there? Is there any principle illustrated here which Jesus had taught earlier what people can do on the sabbath? If so, what is it?
- k. How do you account for the fact that the children shout "Hosanna!" the day AFTER the Messianic Entry into Jerusalem?
- l. Why do you think the scribes and chief priests did not scold the children directly for their shouting Messianic slogans in the temple? Why bother Jesus about it?

- m. In what sense is Jesus' justification of the children's praise a tacit affirmation of His deity?
- n. Why would Jesus leave the city of Jerusalem to go to Bethany to spend the night?
- o. How do you think a sensitive Jewish reader would have understood this event, especially if he lived to see the fall of Jerusalem, the desecration and destruction of the Temple during the first century? Do you think he would have tended to see in Jesus' actions a symbol of the judgment that later came upon that nation, city and temple?
- p. Do you see any connection between this story and using the name of God and the Church to promote financial causes or programs? If so, what connection? If not, why not? Does anything Jesus said or did here touch on the problem of Christian stewardship or financing the Kingdom of God? If so, how, or if not, why not?

PARAPHRASE AND HARMONY

Jesus and the disciples arrived in Jerusalem from Bethany. When He entered the court of God's temple, He began to drive out all the merchants and their customers. He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the benches of the dove merchants. Nor would He allow anyone to use the temple courts as a shortcut for transporting goods.

As He taught them, He said, "The Bible says, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations.' But you have reduced it to a 'den of robbers!'" Now the chief priests and theologians heard all He said, because everyday He taught at the temple. So the blind people and the lame approached Him there, and He healed them. But when the hierarchy and theologians witnessed the wonderful things He did and the children chanting in the temple courts, "Glory to the Son of David!" they were furious and reproached Him, "Can you not hear what these children are saying?"

"Of course," Jesus replied. "And have you perhaps never read, 'Out of the mouth of children and babes in arms, You have procured for yourself perfect praise?'"

At this the chief priests and theologians and leading citizens sought a method to eliminate Him, because they feared Him. Yet they were frustrated, not finding any way to do it, since the vast majority of people was swayed by His teaching. They listened to His words with eager attention.

So when evening came, He left them and went out of the city to Bethany where He spent the night.

SUMMARY

After spending His first night in the Jerusalem area at Bethany, Jesus crossed the Mount of Olives to the city and cursed the fig tree. Then, upon entering the temple court, He cleared out the money-changers and the merchants of animals as well as their customers, refusing to permit anyone to use the Temple as a shortcut or for anything but worship. His vigorous protests did not hinder, but apparently encouraged needy people to approach Him for healing and the children to praise Him. Incensed, the hierarchy objected to His apparent acceptance of Messianic ascriptions of praise. He parried their protests with Scripture. This only fueled their wrath to the point of desiring His elimination, but their efforts to excogitate a workable scheme ended in failure, since the common people eagerly accepted His teaching. At day's end, Jesus left the people in the temple and Jerusalem to return to Bethany for the night.

NOTES

I. RELIGIOUS RACKETEERING

21:12 **And Jesus entered into the temple of God.** For fuller notes on the chronological sequence of these events, see before 21:1: "Matthew's Method." *The temple* consisted of a series of courtyards within courtyards in the innermost of which (the court "of the priests") stood the sanctuary proper (*naòs*). Each successive courtyard was accessible only to designated persons, i.e. Hebrews, women and Gentiles respectively, but all courtyards were considered part of the *temple of God* (*hieròn toù theoù*). The outermost courtyard, into which Jesus would first enter, was the place specified where Gentiles could worship. On the south side of the temple square, this court measured 70 square meters (750 sq. ft.) and was paved with marble (Edersheim, *Temple*, 45). Into this latter enclosure a market had been introduced, according to the Talmud (Jerus, *Chagiga* 78a), by a certain Baba Ben Buta, who "brought 3000 sheep of the flocks of Kedar into the Mount of the House, i.e. into the court of the Gentiles, and so within the consecrated precincts" (*P.H.C.*, XXII, 483). Although not the first to do this, he doubtless did so to meet the needs

of the poor. (Cf. Edersheim, *Life*, I, 370ff.) His motive was above question, but in caring for the Jewish poor, he trampled on the rights of the poor Gentiles! His Jewish sectarianism blinded his own eyes and that of others to Gentiles' right of access to God, and paved the way for shekel-minded profiteers to seize upon this innovation as an excuse to perpetuate this "right-minded" convenience for all foreign Jews who desired to purchase their sacrifices close at hand.

Jesus . . . cast out all them that sold. That this represents a second cleansing of the Temple is seen from the following comparison:

FIRST CLEANSING (John 2)

1. Occurred at the first Passover of Jesus' ministry (John 2:13).
2. Animals mentioned particularly: cattle, sheep, doves (John 2:14).
3. Jesus used scourge on animals (John 2:15).
4. Money-changers' tables overturned.
5. Dove-sellers ordered to transport wares out of temple (John 2:16).
6. "Make not my Father's house a house of merchandise" (2:16).
7. Disciples' reaction indicated (John 2:17).
8. Jews challenged Jesus' right (John 2:18).
9. Jesus answered with prophetic sign of resurrection (John 2:19-22).
10. Jesus worked miracles (John 2:23).
11. Disciples believed Scriptures and Jesus (John 2:22).
12. Jesus' prophetic ministry largely yet future and its outcome not yet decided by events.

SECOND CLEANSING (Synoptics)

1. Occurred just prior to last Passover of Jesus' life (Matt. 26:2).
2. Only doves specially mentioned (Matt. 21:12).
3. No scourge mentioned.
4. Money-changers' tables overturned.
5. No similar order cited.
6. Quotation of Isa. 56:7 and Jer. 7:11: "House of prayer now a den of thieves."
7. No disciples' reaction indicated.
8. Chief rulers challenge Jesus' sense of propriety (Matt. 21:16).
9. Jesus answered with Scripture (Ps. 8:2). Prophetic sign not cited but known (Matt. 26:61; Mark 14:58).
10. Jesus worked miracles (Matt. 21:14).
11. Children praise Him (Matt. 21:15).
12. The outcome of Jesus' prophetic ministry already decided.

The Synoptics did not record the first cleansing, since they omitted the early Judean ministry completely (cf. John 2:13—4:4). John, conversely, could safely bypass the second purification of the temple, because its message is virtually included in the former and could be omitted, since the Synoptics had already recounted it.

Still, why should a second cleansing be thought necessary?

1. Because Jesus was not so respected in the capital, that one purification would have permanently stamped out the scandalous market. Rather, the power bloc in Jerusalem would have been more than eager to regard with public contempt His pretended right to purify the temple.
2. Because persistent graft would have driven the selfish to reinstate what brought them such profits, repeated show-downs would be unavoidable. Consistency would dictate its cleansing every time the abuse repeated itself. But, had they reinstalled the market in the interval between the first and last Passovers of Jesus' ministry, would He have let them get away with it? He may, rather, have ignored its presence, intending to hit it one more time—hard—this last week in connection with the final crisis.
3. Because those driven out the first time had finally found courage to return. It may have taken two or three years for the hierarchy, whose personal profit was most menaced by the market's removal, to re-establish their pet project within the holy precincts. If they were letting the flames cool which Jesus had ignited at the first cleansing, they perhaps thought it politically expedient to wait a year or so before re-inaugurating the temple bazaar.

All them that sold in the temple . . . money-changers . . . them that sold doves. These merchants were needed in Jerusalem to sell sacrificial animals to worshippers who had travelled distances too great to transport their animals with them. Even God Himself had foreseen this need (Deut. 14:24ff.). The money exchange was thought necessary to convert foreign coins, brought in by the pilgrims from outside Palestine, into the "shekel of the sanctuary" for the payment of the temple tax (cf. Exod. 30:13; Matt. 17:24 notes), other free-will offerings and purifications. (Cf. *Shekalim* 1:1-3; Acts 21:24; see *bBerakoth* 47b; *Bekhoroth* 8:7.) Doves, or pigeons, were essential for ritual purifications (cf. John 11:55; Lev. 15:14, 29), but mainly for the sacrifices of the poor (Lev. 5:7, 11; 12:8; 14:22; Luke 2:22-24). These latter were sold in four shops (Jer. Taan. 4:8). Further, sacrificial animals had to be inspected for suitability (Lev. 3:6; 4:3, 23, 28, 32: "without defect"). Even these inspectors could charge a certain amount for their approval (*Bekhor* 4:5). Although Sanhedrin regulations governed the charges that could be made for money exchange and inspection services (see Edersheim, *Temple*, 72), the presence of the Temple market would psychologically lead people to argue, "Better get the right money from authorized changers, than haggle with

unauthorized dealers! If our animal purchase from others elsewhere risks being disqualified on a technicality by temple inspectors, better buy them from the priests themselves, than lose money on unqualified animals!" This thinking leads to a practical monopoly on the entire sacrificial procedure. However, God had not indicated WHERE or FROM WHOM worshippers should purchase things necessary for the feasts (John 13:29).

But if profit-taking from foreign exchange transactions is an old, respected, professional institution, what was their crime? The abuse consisted in the following facts:

1. The market did not need to stand in the very court of the temple where Gentiles were granted the freedom to worship God. Even if no money were involved, the alien peoples were being robbed, not of their wealth, but of their right to worship. The suspicion that this stockyard stood in the larger court is justified by the fact that its noise and dirt would not have been tolerated in the courts nearest the actual sacrificing and worship of the Hebrew men and women. Thoughtfulness on the part of the market's planners should have dictated that the bazaar be located elsewhere, even just outside the temple's walls. But thoughtfulness or consideration of Gentiles' rights was not their strong point. If Caiaphas and company were to protect their monopoly, it had to be kept inside the temple.
2. The unbridled graft of the merchants and money-changers is implied in Jesus' accusation that they had turned God's house into a "den of robbers." Josephus, too, charges Annas, son of Anna, of greed (*Ant. XX, 8,8; 9:2*). Greed had replaced reverence in the temple.

Edersheim (*Life, I, 367ff.*) furnishes the following devastating evidence of this. The markets were called "the Bazaars of the sons of Annas." An aroused, angry population rose and eliminated these bazaars in 67 A.D., decidedly due to the shameful grasping that marked that business (Siphre on Deut. sec. 105; Jer. Peah. 1:6). Profits from the sale of sacrifices were funnelled into the temple treasury for the priests' use. The money changers, too, likely had to buy from leading temple officials their right to pocket a percentage of their profits.

3. Another reason for Jesus' unhesitating hostility to these banking tables is undoubtedly their location, because, for the unwary

visiting Hebrews, the location in the temple communicated an unmistakable aura of sanctity to the services these bankers offered. If they preferred not to deal with unauthorized exchanges elsewhere, they could surely trust these operating within the jurisdiction of God's house. Not subject to competitive tensions of a free market and shielded by the name of God, these moneychangers and animal sellers dishonored God by their monopoly profits.

4. Not only were the merchants at fault, but other thoughtless people, quite unconnected with the market, desecrated the holy place by their noisy passage through its courts as a convenient shortcut to another part of the city (Mark 11:16). This thoughtless disregard for the uniquely sacred purpose for which God ordered the temple built, stole the Gentiles' right to pray unhindered. This made those who did it **THIEVES** in the sight of God whose House it was.

It was into such a temple that the Son of its Owner strode that morning. No wonder **He cast them all out!** Detractors join His original critics to accuse Him of an unworthy outburst of violent anger, indicator of human weakness that vitiates His sinlessness.

1. Far from being a sign of human weakness, this judicial act, expressed Jesus' moral power, in that He vindicated the high honor of God and His House. It would have been a trait of human weakness, had He NOT done so! This means that ANY JEW, filled with a holy zeal for God, should have cleansed the temple long before now. That the whole nation yielded without a serious objection to the interested connivance of their hierarchy, should forever prove who REALLY was compromised by human weakness. (Remember God's blessing on Phinehas! Num. 25:7-13; Ps. 106:30f. And Jesus did not even use a spear!)
2. Rather than exemplify a gross lack of tact or bare iconoclasm, Jesus' attack on crass commercialism in the name of God appealed directly to what ideally was at the heart of every true Hebrew's consciousness of God; respect for the temple of Jahweh. From this point of view, Jesus' proceeding against the abuses is "the most profoundly conservative Jewish act," (Godet citing Beyschlag, *John*, 370) and true Hebrew patriotism.
3. The responsibility for the war rests with those who break the peace. Jesus did not disturb the peace: the guilt for that lay squarely on the shoulders of a corrupt high-priesthood. He simply restored the original peace, because of His merciful, sympathetic concern for people in danger of missing God in that temple.

4. There is here no inconsistency with Jesus' healing the sick in the temple after kicking out the merchants. Ever the Good Shepherd, He drives away the wolves, hirelings and thieves, while at the same time calling His sheep around Him. It is the same spirit that motivates Him, on the one hand, to purify God's House of its polluters or that stimulates Him to help those impeded by human wickedness, on the other. They are just two sides of the same coin.

And for those who criticize Jesus for ignoring many other abuses crying for the attention of the social reformer, by striding into the temple to clean house, let it be said that He was not blind to the former. Rather, He simply recognized that the best way to deal with the blatantly iniquitous social conditions through which He walked was to bring judgment to the House of God first (Ezek. 9:6; I Peter 4:17). As long as the temple and people of God were opposed to the purposes of God, society could not be cured. But the contrary is also true: while the ruin of the people is the fault of its priests, the people faithful to God should also demand better priests! (Jer. 5:31). Jesus is no shallow social reformer easily satisfied with surface changes. He strode right to the heart of society's ills: a perverted and avaricious priesthood and a polluted temple.

He cast them all out. It is mistaken to suppose that the vendors and buyers said absolutely nothing, or that Jesus turned on them a superhuman gaze or divine radiance that stunned them into automatic submission. Although He certainly COULD have done so, is it necessary to the accomplishment of His task as this is seen in the Synoptics or even in John 2:12ff.? The submission of those who surrendered, when they were numerous enough and physically strong enough easily to have overpowered Jesus, may otherwise be accounted for:

1. There was moral power in Christ's sinlessness that made cowards of these materialists. His voice, ringing with zeal for God and hard as steel because He demanded truth and righteousness, pierced their long-sleeping conscience, accusing them of violating their own professed principles. So He had on His side the conscience, not only of the onlookers, but of the merchants themselves.
2. That Jesus could so single-handedly break up the priests' monopoly without any significant opposition may have been due not only to the majestic fury He expressed, but also to the popular support of thousands of pilgrims, resentful of the many years these greedy merchants had taken advantage of them. Although their own boldness was not ready to join Him in His attack, their heart could

definitely recognize the rightness of His deed. It was not unlikely that this very corruption of the temple drove the pious among the Essenes to consider this sanctuary "off limits" and justify themselves in offering sacrifices of their own elsewhere (Josephus, *Ant.*, XVIII,1,5). Lack of any public support for the merchants further weakened their will to resist.

3. He succeeded in doing what it would have taken a troop of soldiers to do, because He had the element of surprise in His favor and pressed His advantage without let-up until reaching His objective.

This majestic roughness is, rather, the sort of thing to be expected, if the Lord ever came suddenly to His temple (Mal. 3:1) to purify the Levites (Mal. 3:2, 3) and to begin the terrible judgment of God at the sanctuary (Ezek. 9:6), even if the temple cleansing does not exhaust all the meaning of these great prophecies.

II. ROYAL REVERENCE

21:13 **And he saith unto them.** Jesus' action was no merely dramatic symbol left for others to interpret. His rationale must be clearly expressed in propositional revelation. **It is written:** from the form of Jesus' rhetorical question (as quoted by Mark 11:17, "Is it not written . . .?") which expected an affirmative answer, it is clear that the Lord hereby intended to defend His course of action on the basis of Biblical texts well-known and unquestionably accepted by His challengers. He depended upon the truthful, valid revelations of Old Testament Scriptures.

A. WHAT GOD'S HOUSE SHOULD BE

My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations (Isa. 56:7).

Although throughout his Gospel Matthew has laid such obvious stress on the place of Gentiles in plan of God (see Special Study: "The Participation of Gentiles" at the end of this volume), it is surprising that he should have omitted what Mark quotes: "for all nations." This would perhaps have been an excellent opportunity to underscore the fact that God loved the Gentiles enough to accept their burnt offerings and sacrifices on His altar and give them joy in His house of prayer (Isa. 56:7a, b).

This omission cannot but draw attention to Jesus' true emphasis on the temple abuses which practically obstructed all Gentile attempts to worship God through *prayer*.

However, it could be fairly argued that Matthew did not HAVE to cite the missing phrase in order to make this point:

1. Because anyone who knew where the market was located, knew that the abuse to be corrected was hindering Gentiles, not Jewish, efforts to worship.
2. Because anyone who knew Isaiah 56:7 could automatically complete anything Matthew omitted, especially from their own familiarity with Isaiah's context that so clearly pictured universal religion beyond any racial, cultural or geographic discrimination. Access to God was not to be controlled nor hindered by sordid business interests of a bio-geographic elite. Rather, access to the God of Israel must remain universal, open to all, not blocked by the shameful comportment of this religion's representatives and custodians. On the other hand, the restoration of the rights of Gentiles in the temple courts may not have been emphasized by Matthew, because the early readers might have wrongly deduced that mere restoration of those rights would have sufficed, whereas God intended a totally new temple! (Eph. 2:11-22).

Nothing could sting the holders of religious power more than this public accusation that exposed them as flagrant violators of the very Word of God of which they claimed to be the only authorized defenders and interpreters. Worse yet, even outsiders—the non-Jews—knew that this area of the temple had been designed by God as a quiet, orderly place for their prayers, but that it had been sabotaged! (Study I Kings 8:29f., 33, esp. 41-43; Ps. 27:4; 65:4.) The avaricious and corrupt high priestly family stood before God and man as guilty of gross violation of God's original intent behind the temple's original function.

B. WHAT GOD'S HOUSE HAD BECOME

But you make it a den of robbers (Jer. 7:11). In Jeremiah's day the temple was frequented by people who, while loudly professing their awareness that the Jerusalem sanctuary was really "the Temple of the Lord," nevertheless dealt unjustly with each other, oppressed

the alien, the fatherless and the widow, shed innocent blood and followed other gods, stole, murdered, committed adultery and perjury. Incredibly, they added insult to their injury of God by supposing that this manner of life could continue on indefinitely, precisely because of God's house in their midst AS A GOOD-LUCK CHARM against any possible future misfortunes. But God considered it really a **den of robbers**.

The objection, that a robbers' den is not used for robbing but as a refuge for robbers, misses the point, because, if anyone stumbled unawares into a "den of robbers" (= refuge, hiding place, home, etc.), he would as surely be robbed there as anywhere else. A Gentile who discovered God and His house and thinking it is a true temple, would be as surely robbed of his new-found faith and piety there by the temple's own custodians, as he would by being waylaid by the desecrations of the same people elsewhere (cf. Rom. 2:17-24!).

You make it a den of robbers. The glaring contrast between "house of prayer" and "den of robbers" places Jesus in diametric opposition to the priesthood's administration of the temple sanctioned by the elders. Thus He is charging this high body with profanity and is attacking an exceedingly powerful private interest. But the religion of the God of Israel must not be turned into a lucrative source of profit for anyone! Here once again we see the paradoxical converging of (1) the religious pride of the elect people of God and (2) the shamelessness of their immorality. Just as Isaiah and Jeremiah had done in their day, so now Jesus blasts Israel's religious pride and self-seeking, mercenary activities. A **den of robbers** was a verdict right out of their own Bible! Rather than offer the grace of God freely and generously to all people, the shepherds of Israel only grudgingly opened God's temple to non-Israelites, and so pampered Jewish national pride. They used God and temple for their own advantage, taking advantage of the weakness and ignorance of poor, innocent people. Exploiting people by charging exorbitant prices for sacrifices is no less the sin of stealing than is robbery.

Further, if Jesus is right in judging the temple to be governed by conditions also prevailing in Jeremiah's day, conditions that demanded divine vengeance, just as He had done earlier at Shiloh's tabernacle with identical justification (Jer. 7:12-15), would not these same conditions demand that God destroy the temple again? This

judgment by Jesus should alert us to expect Him to prophesy the temple's destruction. In this way He prepares the reader's mind for Matthew 23:38 and 24:2. In fact, a few decades later the temple actually became even more literally a cave of murderers, as the Assassins turned it into a theater for their atrocities. (See Josephus, *Wars*, IV,3,7; §§10,12; IV,6,3.) Yet, even Jeremiah offered mercy to those who repent (Jer. 7:5, 7). Does Jesus' citation of Jeremiah's ominous phrase imply that repentance is their only hope of saving their lives, their temple and their nation?

III. RIGHT RESPONSE

21:14 **And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple.** This quiet sentence silences all who put down Jesus' temple cleansing to a reprehensible outburst of violent anger. The Lord's ringing condemnation of the unholy treatment of God's house and merciless exposure of its administrators certainly did not deter the needy from approaching this same Lord to seek merciful help. In the midst of Jesus' overturning of tables, scattering coins and knocking down benches, His roughness with the vendors, sellers and the indifferent traipsing through the temple and despite His wrath against all that defiled, these needy people were unable to discern any pettishness or rejection in His words or manner. Rather, in the marvelous compassion He was displaying toward the Gentiles as He cleared the market out of the courtyard designated for their worship, the troubled Hebrews could sense a kindness that invited them too.

WHY THESE MIRACLES IN THE TEMPLE?

By what right does the Nazarene turn God's House from a market into a HOSPITAL?! How would His miracles be conducive to prayer, when His own protest implied that the market distracted the mind from God? Would not the amazed witnesses' exclamations be as fully distracting to Gentiles as would the bawling of cattle merchants and the clink of the money-changers' coins? How could He justify that?

1. These unfortunates may have approached Jesus, not immediately after the temple cleansing, but while "he was teaching daily in the temple" (Luke 19:47a). In fact, healing and instruction probably continued all the rest of that day. (See Matt. 21:17f.; Mark 11:12,

- 19.) If so, while Matthew's repeated expression, "in the temple" (vv. 12, 14, 15) seems to imply immediate connection with the cleansing, he does not offer us tight time connections. Jesus may have healed them after the stated hours for prayer or in some temple area other than in the Court of the Gentiles.
2. On the other hand, if He did these miracles right in the still untidy court before the dust had settled on the debris, even as the last hawker scrambled to collect his scattered shekels, Jesus desired to show how a righteous anger that eliminates what is wrong, is perfectly harmonious with doing what is positively right. Merciful healing for the sightless and crippled is motivated not only by compassionate love but also by a deep and holy anger at what left them helpless, anger enough to do the thing needed to eliminate that evil from their lives. (Cf. John 11:33, 35, 38; Mark 3:5; see my comments on 5:22.)
 3. If the Qumran *Rule of Congregation* (1 QM 2:5-22) excluded the lame, blind, deaf and dumb from the congregation and from the Messianic banquet, and if the Mishnah excluded them from appearing before the Lord in the temple (cf. Chagigah 1:1), then, Jesus, the Lord of the temple, not only encouraged their approach, but also qualified them to worship by eliminating their disability and consequent disqualification.
 4. If the temple is a "house of prayer," then should not these, who believe Jesus to be the direct channel for the power of God, address their petitions to Him in His Father's house? This was converted by Jesus into no mere hospital, where the infirm may convalesce slowly, but into a veritable door of Heaven where men were made perfectly and instantly whole by the power of Him whose House it was. If the temple IS God's house, as Jesus declares, cannot He do anything He wants to in His own house?!
 5. The exalted authority, that our Lord had claimed to exercise, required evidence of His right so to act. The miracles became His credentials to support His implied right. It is clear that God approved, since no man could do these things unless God were with him! (John 3:2; 10:37f.; 14:10f.; Acts 10:38).
 6. Further, if the temple's purpose was to turn Gentiles' attention to the true, living God who answers prayers and really helps men on earth, then Jesus' miracles, which tended to produce this very effect (Matt. 15:31), harmonized perfectly with the temple's intended use.

And he healed them, not in some obscure village or distant desert where none could test the reality of His power to cure. Rather, He did it in the capital city, right in its temple under the skeptical scrutiny of His severest critics. And because all was so public, the multitudes of eye-witnesses, awed by His miracles and amazed by His teaching (Mark 11:18; Luke 19:48), proved to be a psychologically impassible barrier around Jesus, stymying His foes' plot to suppress Him. Nothing could stop Him from doing good, whether on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-14) or in the temple! In short, He practiced His own principle that God wants mercifulness and not merely sacrifice. (See notes on 12:7.)

IV. RAGING REACTIONARIES

21:15 **The chief priests** were Sadducees (Acts 5:17; Josephus, *Ant.*, XX,9,1). These Sadducean high priests were dedicated, among other things, to these points:

1. A purely materialistic world-view that all but denied God's right to be present in and act within His own creation. (Cf. Matt. 22:23; Acts 23:8.)
2. A liberal view of the Old Testament canon that left little room for conscientious service to God that tried to go by ALL the Book.

Jesus' dramatic protest and His appeal to Scripture instantly drew fire from the aristocracy, because He threatened the security of their hold on a lucrative source of income. Until the Last Week, objections to Jesus had come from the Pharisees. Now, however, He has just touched the nerve-center of the high priests, the temple. Consequently, these elitists will figure even more prominently among Jesus' opponents until they all finally collaborate to perpetrate His judicial murder. (They are mentioned 19 times: 21:15,23,45; 26:3,14,47,57,59,62,63,65; 27:1,3,6,12,20,41,62; 28:11.)

When the chief priests and the scribes saw, they became first-hand witnesses, therefore qualified to give authoritative testimony to the reality of His marvelous deeds. What did they see?

1. **The wonderful things that He did.**

- a. His proper display of orthodox zeal for the holiness of the temple, backed by Scripture they could not publicly deny.
 - (1) Although Sadducees neglected the prophets (Edersehim, *Life*, II,397), the Lord did not hesitate to cite them as

God's Word, because of their thoroughly adequate attestation as spokesmen for God and because of their place in the more widely recognized Jewish canon.

(2) Sadducean rejection of the prophets would be exposed even further, if they had publicly objected to His citations from Isaiah and Jeremiah, for "all men held them to be prophets of God" too. (Cf. Author's *Matthew*, III,434f.)

b. They must have stood speechless in the presence of Jesus' undeniable miracles (21:14), because they were unquestionable evidence of real, supernatural power operative through Jesus in the realm of the real, testable, material world. This they could not oppose without denying what they themselves had personally witnessed nor without reverting to the already discredited Pharisean contention that His power was really that of the devil (Matt. 12:24ff.).

2. and the children that were crying in the temple and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David. We see here:

a. The joyous enthusiasm of children attracted to Jesus because they knew He loved them. He was no ogre whose supposedly vicious attack in the temple should have frightened children. Rather, they approach Him, shouting His praise shortly after the temple cleansing and in psychologically direct connection with the Messianic demonstration the day before during the triumphal entry (Mark 11:1, 12, 15). The temple cleansing rekindled their enthusiasm and set them to chanting His Messianic glory. He really wanted "the little children to come to" Him (cf. 19:13-15 notes) and they could sense this even without artificial invitations or prompting.

b. The unprejudiced sincerity of these children is obvious in their evident lack of that self-protecting prudence so characteristic of their elders who could better grasp something of the deadly struggle taking place between Jesus and authorities.

c. The manifest rightness of these children's confession is vindicated by no less an authority than Jesus Himself. However little they understood the issues at stake, what they uttered was TRUTH, and, as far as it went, that TRUTH must be defended and believed and acted upon, even if spoken by children.

But, having witnessed all this evidence of the Lord's glory, rather than submitting their souls to His leadership, **the chief priests and scribes . . . were indignant!** Godet (*John*, 364) notes:

We meet here a fact, which will repeat itself at every manifestation of the Lord's glory; a twofold impression is produced, according to the moral predisposition of the witnesses; some find in the act of Jesus nourishment for their faith; for others the same act becomes a subject of offense. It is the pre-existing moral sympathy or antipathy that determines the impression.

The Sadducean temple priests are deeply threatened by Jesus, because, far from keeping His particular claims or teaching to Himself, He insisted on asserting His understanding of God right in Jerusalem and even in the temple precincts themselves! Unpopular with the majority, the priestly power had no refuge other than the temple, and the Galilean Prophet publicly threatened not only the impending end of their monopoly on the temple but also of the power they derived therefrom (Luke 13:35; cf. Matt. 23:38; John 2:20 with Matt. 26:61). Many reasons serve to explain the hierarchy's outrage:

1. They were the offenders, enraged at Christ's rebuking them by exposing their gross, wanton unfaithfulness to their God-given duty, in the presence of those whose opinion of their piety they had cultivated with great care.
2. They were pompous officials, men of rank and dignity, annoyed by the boldness and "naughtiness" of the children in their holy temple.
3. Because they were unbelievers, they expressed impotent rage at any form of public recognition given to Jesus' claims to Christhood, thinking it childish blasphemy, while totally blind to the blasphemy of their own lives. **Hosanna to the Son of David:** because this shout is the basis of the priests' objection to Jesus' tacit permission of the children's praise, it forever proves how Jewish authorities of Jesus' day understood this title. Now, none can argue, as some modern Jewish scholars try, that these words do not convey the concept of a personal Messiah promised to Israel who would actually be born of David's family. Rather, to any objection that those children were only singing innocent Psalms, whereas silence was called for, the authorities of Israel

then present silence these quibbles by practically shouting, "Do you not hear what they are saying?!" These understood.

4. Because they were fearful, they may have been maddened by their own ineptness in dealing with a problem that rightly lay within their responsibility to solve.
 - a. They lacked courage to act in their proper official capacity as the guarantors of orthodoxy. (Contrast Saul of Tarsus!)
 - b. They feared His popular influence. Their concern would be for national security, their own position and nation (John 11:48). They clearly grasped the universality of His appeal, as representative groups from the entire nation (*ho laòs gàr hàpas*) sympathized with Him.
 - c. Or did they fear the tremendous firepower at His disposal, which had not yet been unleashed against them? Did they fear Him as a powerful magician in the service of Satan? (Cf. John 18:4-8 with Matt. 26:53.)
 - d. While we cannot absolutely discount a supernatural manifestation of the majesty of His deity only slightly dimmed by human flesh, is it likely that Jesus had to awe them with this glory to hold them at bay until their hour had struck? (Study Luke 22:52f.)
 - e. They feared the people whose applause for Jesus heralded Him as their Hero. They could foresee that, if they touched so much as a hair of Jesus' head, an aroused citizenry would begin to clamor for their expulsion. Could they ride out the furious firestorm that must issue?

21:16. These politicians, who socialized with those who could promote their interests and used the little people for their own ends, were aghast that the Galilean dared to defend the cause of the down-trodden, the foreigner, and diseased and the juveniles. So, frustrated by their own lack of arguments against His miracles, afraid to object to the multitudes' joyous demonstrations of religious enthusiasm, and cornered by their own confusion, they can only object weakly to the unsought praise given Jesus by little children! Helplessly, they ask, **Do you hear what these are saying?**

Should it appear unlikely that there were crowds of excited children in the temple courts, since surely the temple police would have quickly and capably stopped them, had they really been shouting what Matthew reports, notice that:

1. Jesus' critics hold Him responsible to attend to the children, implying that HE must shut them up, as if such police did not have that responsibility.
2. Is it unthinkable that, during the great feasts, when the whole nation was gathered together, the children should have organized themselves for games during their free time, or even for just such praise and dancing as seems evident here? Let Matthew's critics go study children!
3. The question uppermost with the priests is not noise per se, but WHAT the boys were shouting.
4. Further, THIS day was like no other upon which modern critics should base their judgment, since, as Barclay (*Matthew*, II,274) says:
 Things were happening that day in the Temple Court which had never happened before. It was not every day that the traders and the money-changers were sent packing, and . . . the blind and the lame were healed. Maybe ordinarily it would have been impossible for the children to shout like this, but then this was no ordinary day.

Their complaint is as ironic as the whole scene is natural:

1. They who for so long had promoted the noisy market in the temple, with its stinking animals and dusty, haggling merchants, because there was money in it for them, now sanctimoniously declare themselves to be scandalized by the singing of innocent lads who thus desecrate the sacred temple of the Lord!
2. Worse, they are now as wrong in demanding the crushing of the boys' enthusiasm, as they had earlier been mistaken in not abolishing the temple bazaar themselves!

Since Jesus could have quieted the children, but had not done so, the priests lay the blame on Him for allowing the shameful situation to continue. In this implied rebuke, these Sadducees echo the Pharisees' bitter jealousy, "Master, rebuke thy disciples!" (Luke 19:39). Perhaps they expect this provincial prophet to back down, mumble an apology or perhaps sneak out of town. Instead, He meets their challenge with quiet defiance.

V. A REFINED REMINDER

21:16 **And Jesus said to them, Yes.** In fact, could He have FAILED to notice language the content of which cried out for notice? He

calmly goes about His work as Messiah, mirroring the ancient adage: "Let another's mouth praise you." Without explicitly affirming His Messiahship, He deliberately permitted the boys to chant the truth that He longed to impress upon people by His deeds and teaching.

The fuming authorities ask, "Do you not HEAR?" to which Jesus demands, **Have YOU never READ?** Had they known their Bible—as they above all Hebrews should have known it—had they recalled those very Scriptures they claimed to honor and teach, they could have remembered that text which completely vindicated everything to which they had just now objected!

In order better to appreciate Jesus' highly condensed rebuttal, we must comprehend the objection that provoked it. In fact, both the objection and Jesus' answer are highly compressed, implying several unstated propositions. We might attempt to express the detractors' unstated logic as follows:

1. The children call you "Son of David," a title equivalent to "Messiah," our national Hebrew Ideal Man, God Anointed sent to bless Israel.
2. But you, Jesus, are but a common man like any other and your program is a bad representation of the great Messianic Kingdom of David's Son.
3. Therefore, you could not be the Messiah, God's Ideal Man, Son of David.
4. Therefore, honesty should compel you to silence the children's ignorant and misdirected praise. Consistency would demand that your anxiety to remove what you term "disorder in God's House" should also eliminate these urchins' unjustifiable outbursts.

Their fundamental objection is thus based on what appears to them to be His painfully evident common humanness. They suppose that His ordinariness disqualifies Him for Messiahship. So, how does Jesus answer the dignitaries? He simply quoted Psalm 8:2.

MATTHEW 21:16

HEBREW ORIGINAL OF PSALM 8:2

Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings

Out of the mouth of children and sucklings because of your adversaries, You have created a power to still Your enemy and the revengeful.

You have perfected praise.

Many correctly affirm that Psalm 8 is not Messianic in the usual sense of explicitly predicting some phase of Christ's ministry, person or work. Nevertheless, that Psalm 8 is definitely Christological

(= Messianic) is forever established by Jesus who used it to defend, not merely little children, but specifically to vindicate **what they are saying**, i.e. praise to Jesus as Messiah. So the CONTENT of the boys' praise finds its defense, according to the Lord, in Psalm 8 too. We may expect, then, that this Psalm describe, even indirectly, what Messiah must be or do. In fact, is there any reason, inherent in the Psalm or in Jesus' situation, why the connection Jesus draws between what the children are saying and the Psalm itself, should not be weighed into a proper exegesis of this text?

Because Jesus' recorded answer consists in a brief citation of one portion of a verse from Psalm 8, the question arises:

1. Did He intend to refer exclusively to the verse cited?
 - a. If so, is He merely making some logical argument, as, for example, from the smaller to the greater? That is, "If infants can speak truly when praising God, as Psalm 8 shows, why complain, if larger children speak truly about me? Deal with the infants in Psalm 8 first, then come complain about these bigger children here!"
 - b. Or, is He leading these priestly scholars into the deeper meaning of the verse cited? And would not that meaning be rooted in its context? But this conducts us to the following possibility:
2. Is He not, rather, alluding to the entire Psalm in which the verse cited not only finds its context and significance, but of which it is also the capsulized summation?

If accepted, this latter view includes the former and would reveal Jesus' interpretation of the Psalm's true meaning and, at the same time, would reveal the smashing brilliance of His defense.

So, if we have correctly surmised that Jesus intends to establish the correctness of the children's words by citing this Psalm, we must also correctly intuit the logical steps by which He does this. Jesus' highly condensed argument may be expressed in the following equations:

God's Ideal Man = Messiah = David's Son = Little Baby = Man at his weakest = God's normal means to silence His enemies, rule the earth and glorify Himself. Therefore, a fully human, apparently feeble Messiah is not unthinkable, but even highly probable. Therefore, my genuine humanness is no disqualification for Messiahship, but rather an extremely appropriate qualification and an invitation to examine my other credentials.

Consider each step individually:

I. GOD'S IDEAL MAN TO RULE THE EARTH IS THE MESSIAH

- A. This proposition is only apparently extraneous to the general discussion, but is really fundamental to it and most appropriate.
 - 1. In fact, the Hebrew officials could not discern in Jesus that exquisite combination of qualities they should have associated with the Ideal Man whom God would anoint to be Messiah.
 - 2. Further, by pointing His detractors to Psalm 8, the Lord instantly raises the issue of what sort of Ideal Man God has in mind to be His Anointed One.
- B. Thus, if then-contemporary Judaism thought of their Ideal Man as a Jewish Superman, their concept must be modified to match God's promises concerning the true nature of "the Anointed One."
- C. God's Ideal Man, the fitting Leader of mankind, is Messiah, a fact implicitly recognized by the Biblical Judaism of the centuries preceding Jesus' appearance on earth. (Many precious prophecies laid the groundwork for this concept, e.g.: Gen. 3:15; Deut. 18:15-18; II Sam. 7:11-16; Ps. 2; 110:1-4; Isa. 7:14; 8:13f.; 9:2-7; 11:1ff.; 40:3-11; 42:1-7; 52:13—53:12; 61:1ff.; Zech. 9:9; Mal. 3:1, etc.)
- D. It would be a temptation for Judaism to make the mistake of assuming that Messiah would suddenly appear in His glory, fully endowed with supernatural power, however bearing no really radical connection with the misery and humiliation involved in the human condition. Such a view, however, must be corrected by the observation that, since the Christ is a true Son of David, He must be thought of as a real, human baby born of real Davidic ancestry. (See Prop. III below.)

II. THE MESSIAH IS THE SON OF DAVID

- A. No right-minded Hebrew would dare debate this proposition in Jesus' day (22:41ff.). Then-current Judaism, in fact, expected a personal Messiah to be born in a given town and of a prophetically indicated parentage (Matt. 23-6; John 7:41f.).

- B. Can the sure oath of God to David fail to establish one of his descendants upon the throne (II Sam. 7:11-16; Ps. 132:11-18)?

III. THE SON OF DAVID WILL BE A LITERAL BABY

- A. If the Christ must be born of the lineage of David, how could this occur, unless He were a perfectly normal, human BABY, although he be the royal child? Does Messiahship, or birth in to David's family, somehow exempt "the Son of David" from being someone's little boy? Whatever else may be affirmed of Him, should not Messiah of all people, be authentically HUMAN, born of human parentage? Could anyone doubt that the "Child born to us" to reign on David's throne (Isa. 9:6f.), the son of the virgin (Isa. 7:14), must be genuinely MAN, i.e. fully human?
- B. And if He must be the Ideal Man, should He not be born a common Baby, so as to identify perfectly with His people of whom He would be the true, typical representative?

IV. BUT A BABY IS MAN AT HIS WEAKEST

- A. Even though He be the Son of David and future Messiah, how could (= why should) this baby be exempt from all the usual, negative aspects of the human condition? If Jewish theologians cannot conceive of the great "Son of David" as appearing on earth in so inglorious a form as that of a little baby, they must be taught that, despite the striking insignificance of Man, God entrust to HIM the gigantic task of administration of the world to come. (This concept is developed by Paul; Heb. 2:6ff.; I Cor. 15:27; Eph. 1:22). If man's common humanness be construed as a stumbling block and a cause for the disgrace of disqualification for God's great work, let it be remembered that man IN HIMSELF is nothing.
- B. Here, then, is David's original understanding expressed in Psalm 8. The Psalm's theme is: "God's Glory Revealed in His Glorification of Man," a theme developed in three steps:
1. Man's comparative frailty is evident in his microscopic insignificance in contrast to the magnitude of God's heavens (Ps. 8:3, 4).

2. Man's conferred dignity is evidence that any greatness he enjoys has been granted him by God (Ps. 8:5).
 - a. God made man just lower than Heavenly Beings.
 - b. God crowned man with glory and honor.
 3. Man's constituted authority, as seen in his influence over the rest of earth's creatures, is also God's gift (Ps. 8:6-8).
- C. Therefore, God's glorification of Man forever proves that any dignity and importance we attribute to man is contingent, not absolute; conferred, not earned. For the Psalmist, if there is anything great about man, it is because God graciously conferred it on him. There is nothing inherent in man—either in his native or his acquired abilities or in his personal or group achievements—that qualifies him for such an exalted position. Man's greatness is the unmerited gift from GOD. Human dignity has no reality or meaning, except as it finds these in God's gracious purpose for delegating it to him.
- D. Therefore, if the Son of David must be a little baby, man at his weakest, it is not unthinkable that Messianic royalty should be conferred upon him, despite his apparent weaknesses and lack of qualification in the judgment of the great of earth.
- E. If this proposition seems threatening, because babyhood is the nadir experience of human weakness, the tension is resolved by the glorious truth of the proposition which follows:

V. BUT MAN AT HIS WEAKEST IS GOD'S NORMAL INSTRUMENT (Psalm 8)

- A. The theme of Psalm 8 is introduced by a principle that explains why God should choose to elevate man to such exceptional dignity: although our Lord possesses all majesty in heaven and on earth, He has chosen to deal with His opposers and enemies, not by some personal feat of heavenly might, but by using MAN to do it (Ps. 8:1f.). To rule the world and still His enemies, our God needs only that power available in His effective use of what all would deem to be absurdly inadequate means, e.g. human beings. (Cf. the voices of children versus God's mighty enemies, Ps. 8:2;

puny man versus the total creation, vv. 3-8.) And, because this Psalm essentially summarizes Genesis 1 and 2, we understand that this concept is God's typical procedure, not the exception. God glorifies His name and humiliates His enemies and He utilizes firepower no more formidable than the spontaneous praise of those who are little better than BABES;

B. The Psalm establishes God's normal procedure: He delights to display His greatness by making skillful use of absurdly feeble instruments to produce incredible effective results. Therefore, human depreciation of any of God's servants or means, based on what proud mortals may eventually think of His servants' apparent unworthiness, insignificance or obscurity, is absolutely no indication of their usefulness or worth to God. Whom God qualifies for His service is qualified, whether haughty sinners admit it or not! And God can enable him to succeed mightily at the task to which He sets him.

C. From the foregoing premises, it is now possible to see the point of Jesus' implied conclusion:

VI. THEREFORE, A FULLY HUMAN, APPARENTLY FEEBLE MESSIAH IS NOT INCONCEIVABLE, BUT EVEN HIGHLY PROBABLE, BECAUSE FULLY VINDICATED BY SCRIPTURE (Psalm 8).

A. The stumbling block for the theologians was not the humanness of the Messiah but that God could have sent so glorious a Christ in so inglorious a form! Because Psalm 8 speaks of the high irony of God's planning, should not Jesus' objectors reread it to understand that God has always used what is insignificant in man's eyes to bring Himself glory? (A not unknown principle: I Cor. 1:18-31; Matt. 11:25; II Cor. 12:7-10. Remember David's defeat of Goliath.)

B. By citing Psalm 8, Jesus dispatched the priests' implied arguments by teaching them to see God's normative use of common MEN, not supermen or angels, to praise Him and rule the earth. If the philosophical antsupernaturalism of the Sadducean chief priests keeps them from accepting Jesus' claims to be God's Son, therefore, in some sense, deity, then let them consider Him as a MAN! But let them do this in the light of God's purpose for Man as this is revealed in Scripture!

- C. By citing Psalm 8 in defense of the children's ascription of Messiahship to Him, Jesus implies that the long-awaited Christ, David's Son, must be fully MAN, even man at his weakest, a little baby. Because of these leaders' preconceptions as to what God's Kingdom and Messiah must be, they had lost their ability to look objectively at ANY man to wonder how God could use that man to glorify Himself. Had they looked at Jesus in this light, they would have been able to see those supernatural credentials which indisputably signalled God's stamp of approval upon Him as true "Son of David." By thinking that common humanness is unimportant as a proper condition of Messiahship, they also missed seeing the glorious condescension of God who, in the mortal clay of Jesus, prepared to conquer the Evil One. So, His very obvious humanness and lack of qualification in the eyes of His critics, should have been an argument for joining the children in praising God for giving such authority to MEN! (Cf. Matt. 9:8.) This is why the objection that, because Jesus seemed to them but a mere man He could not qualify to be "Son of David," is itself inappropriate. After all, could the Word of God (Psalm 8) be thought to have failed in its promise that, somehow, some MAN would bring to completion God's plan?
- D. By quoting Psalm 8, Jesus directed His questioners to check out His other qualifications, since David taught that whom-ever God elevates to high dignity is thereby qualified by His sovereign grace, and all previous estimates of THAT man's unworthiness must be revised! Let the chief priests quietly reflect upon His works, His character and His results. Even if they choked on His claims, upon reflection they might yet see how truly all that He did praised God.

From this standpoint, then, Psalm 8 contains no direct or unique reference either to the Messiah or to the little children's praising Him. Rather, it contained the principle: "God's glory is revealed in His glorification of Man," a principle most appropriately applicable to Jesus as Messiah. In fact, man's highest dignity and actual universal dominion over the earth would be realized only in Him (Heb. 2:6ff.; I Cor. 15:27; Eph. 1:22). From this perspective, Jesus Himself was one such "little child," whose natural weakness God would turn into sufficient strength to defeat His enemies and silence the revengeful,

rule the earth and glorify God. (Cf. Rev. 12:5; 17:14 as pictorial representation of this same truth: it is the Lamb, not the great dragon or the beasts, that conquers!)

Because Psalm 8 is not strictly Messianic, it is of much wider application. In fact, the short-sighted chief priests, by despising the children's praise, failed to understand that those feeble adorers of God, whose childlike affirmations of faith in God's Christ were real, were even then effectively defeating God's adversaries. How did they do this?

1. God was proving to sceptics that humble, teachable people can actually see what is objectively "there," i.e. Jesus' true Messiahship. These children, untrammelled by prejudice and tradition, let themselves be completely convinced by the impression Jesus produced on their minds, whereas the Sadducean high priests' minds were bogged down in rationalizations and biased misjudgments. However keen their intellect, these men of corrupt heart could look upon the Son of David in person and yet not discern His true identity nor glorify God for it! But their numerous doubts and cynical criticisms were devastated by the guileless, spontaneous confession of love and trust by these children. The unfeigned purity of feeling expressed in the chanting of these children warmed Jesus, and proved that ALL men COULD HAVE recognized and praised Him as did they. At the same time it condemned ("silenced" Ps. 8:2) those who not only would not worship Him, but, worse, began to plot His murder.
2. The "little children" concept in Scripture is God's normal procedure. Therefore, the scribes' estimations of what is required to establish the great Messianic Kingdom are all miscalculations. If God can take what appears to be a common Galilean, Jesus of Nazareth, and utilize Him to do all that is involved in being "the Son of David," if one day God will vindicate the rightness of the little children's praise over against the established conclusions of theological scholarship of that day, if He can transform simple fishermen and taxcollectors, farmers and housewives into frontline troops to bring about the subjugation of the earth, then God is acting as He always has and His Kingdom is right on course! (I Cor. 1:18-31).
 - a. The Messiah's Kingdom, for its advancement, needs no more formidable weaponry than that strength wielded by common believers so despised by worldlings enamored with the usual arms of "manly" warfare. (Cf. II Cor. 3:4-6; 4:7; 10:3-5; 12:8.)

- b. God's choice of adults, who are hardly better than little children, to promote the progress of His Kingdom, is ample proof of His real control over it. (Study notes on Matt. 11:25f.; 18:3f.) To defeat the awful power of evil, God maneuvers only the awesome might of the meek! (21:5, the Messianic King; 11:29).
3. Jesus' own program for world conquest is also in Psalm 8, as He too had already made the "little children" concept His own. He knew that the best kind of praise and service to God is that which comes from simple, sincere people who can receive from God without judging Him or having to tell Him what He can or cannot do. Since ordinary people, who did not count for much on the social scale, recognized and praised Jesus at a time when their great ones refused to do so, in God's eyes they condemned the angry arrogance of His opposition. Those who glorify human accomplishments, who seek and give human praise, and who continue to reject our Lord Jesus Christ, do not deserve to be made citizens of God's Kingdom. And they shall not have it! (Luke 12:32). In short, the followers of Jesus, the CHURCH, is really the sort of Messianic program that God has always had in mind. The great God of heavenly armies would perfect His praise, not by some dazzling display of divine power nor by the eloquence of great, wise or learned men of earth—as men expect Him to—, but by the effective use of sincere, humble people who can speak His truth taught them by Jesus! According to Jesus, as the old hymn has it,

Not with swords' loud clashing
 Nor roll of stirring drums
 With deeds of love and mercy
 The heavenly Kingdom comes.

4. To recognize and praise God's Christ is to recognize and praise God Himself (John 5:22f.; Matt. 10:40; Luke 10:16). The enthusiasm of the children who praised Jesus, in essence, said that God had marvellously succeeded in bringing His Anointed into the world. So God received glory as truly from these irrepressible little boys as from choirs of angels around His throne, and should not Jesus defend them? And should not the most fitting setting for it be God's House?
5. Even if someone noticed that Psalm 8 spoke directly of children's praising the LORD, whereas Jesus cited it to defend children's praising Himself, His citation is legitimate, because, in a very true sense, Jesus is really Jahweh come to earth as a genuine human

being to subject all things to Himself (Matt. 1:23; Phil. 2:5-7; John 1:1, 14, 18). Since Jesus had already furnished ample proof that His claims to deity are all true, the burden of proof to the contrary lay on those who denied it. (For His claims, see notes on 11:27; for His proofs, think of John 10:37f.; 14:10f. and 3:2.)

VI. A RETREAT FOR REFLECTION AND REST

21:17 And he left them and went forth out of the city to Bethany and lodged there. Because Matthew used a participle (*katalipòn*, here rendered "left"), which may just as easily be a circumstantial temporal participle subordinate to the main verb (*exêlthen*, "went forth"), it may be rendered "when He left them, He went forth." There is therefore no contradiction with Mark's information that the Lord actually left the temple much later that day (Mark 11:19). Yet, *katalipòn* has something of the flavor of "to abandon, leave to one's destiny," (Rocci, 989). So it is not mistaken to see the Lord as having verbally silenced His critics with a deft parry from Scripture, then turning on His heel, leaving them to ponder His words (cf. Matt. 16:4b). Although *he left* the chief priests and scribes fuming, the crowds stayed right with Him, because the rest of that day was given over to teaching on such a popular level that literally hundreds of people crowded around Him to absorb His lessons (Mark 11:18; Luke 19:48).

He went forth out of the city for several possible reasons:

1. The city of Jerusalem, during Passover week, teemed with pilgrims, as the entire Jewish nation gathered for the feast, bringing in tourists from all over the Mediterranean world. Edersheim (*Temple*, 31), citing Tacitus, affirmed that within the city dwelt a population of 600,000 people, but which, according to Josephus, swelled to a figure between two and three million at feast time. The conditions in the crowded metropolis pushed rabbis to declare that, during the feasts—except on the first night—the people might camp outside the city, however within the limits of a sabbath-day's journey. Hence, hospitality outside the crowded, noisy city would bring welcome rest to the Savior.
2. Further, **he went forth . . . to Bethany and lodged there**, not unlikely because His three friends of Bethany, who had hosted Him on many other occasions, would perhaps insist that He lodge with them again (cf. Luke 10:38ff.; John 11:2f.; 12:1-8; Matt. 26:6-13).

Bethany, in fact, being just over the Mount of Olives 3 km (under 2 mi.) to the east of the city (John 11:18), on the eastern slope of the mount (cf. Luke 24:50 with Acts 1:12), furnished a handy base to and from which He could commute everyday to Jerusalem, returning each evening (Luke 21:37f.; Mark 11:11, 12, 15, 19, 20, 27).

3. Another possible reason for spending the nights outside Jerusalem was Jesus' own use of proper caution. Even though He was perfectly confident that none could really arrest Him until the hour assigned for it by God, He prudently avoided their clutches by staying just out of their immediate reach.

WHY DID JESUS PURIFY THE TEMPLE?

This is Phase II of the Messianic Offensive. Jesus' assault on Jerusalem began with the Messianic "triumphal entry." This is proved by Matthew's direct connection drawn between the temple-cleansing with the bold Messianic declaration made during the entry. Jesus recognized that the real enemy of Israel was not Rome. His strategy, therefore, lay not in political or military power struggles, but in making men pure before God; He attacked the real enemy, Satan, not the apparent foe, the State. Israel, He sees, must be freed, not from occupation to soldiers, but from preoccupation with sin.

1. Was Jesus' purpose merely to criticize the hypocritical worship of the temple's custodians, who, on the excuse of honoring God, turned it into a source of financial advantage for themselves? This certainly harmonizes with the position occupied by the ancient prophets. In fact, Jesus stands impressively and solidly in the great prophetic tradition and fully supports all that His predecessors had decried. He would therefore need no further vindication of His actions.

To those who question the permanent good done by His mechanical purification of the temple if He cleansed not their hearts, thus stopping the external abuse while leaving their wicked mentality, let it be answered that He justified His deed by appeal to the Law and the Prophets. If people could be made sensitive to the divine authority of these, perhaps they could also be led to acknowledge their need for repentance and be brought all the way to confess Him whom God sent.

2. Is there DEITY implied here? Since Jesus had connected the ministry of John the Baptist with the prophecy of Malachi 3 (Matt.

11:10, 14), and since John was the messenger to appear just before the Lord Himself should suddenly appear in His temple to purify, should not the whole, complex event of Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem, and particularly in the temple to cleanse it, be seen as a fulfilment of Malachi's prophecy? But would the reader have drawn this conclusion from such distant premises? Nevertheless, Matthew's deliberate connection of the temple cleansing with the Messianic Entry of Israel's divine King (cf. 21:4f. and Zech. 9:9) intends to interpret this temple cleansing in terms of Jesus' divine dignity. In light of Zechariah 9:9, Jesus acted out the Messianic symbolism. He expressed His justice by refusing to tolerate the profaning of God's House. He showed His meekness and victory by healing the blind and lame and by accepting the evidence of how deeply His influence had penetrated the masses of Israel by justifying the praise of those who are often last of all to be affected by intellectual choices, the children. While He did not defend His actions as evidence of His essential Sonship (as in the case of the first cleansing, John 2:16: "my Father's house"), His deeds are not inconsistent with it. Rather, they are what we might expect of One fully conscious of His Sonship. His felt consciousness of deity and sovereignty over the temple did not have to be stated as the basis of His actions. This could be amply demonstrated in His own place for teaching and healing. Nevertheless, because we have already seen that in Jesus Christ we have "something greater than the temple" (12:6), we are already prepared psychologically to see it as part of Jesus' Messianic symbolism to claim Lordship over the temple by restoring it to its right use.

3. Or is this gesture a visual announcement that God is about to abandon the temple, leaving it and its hypocritical worshippers to the natural consequences of His abandoning their house which they so flagrantly abused and polluted (23:38)? From this standpoint, His gesture is more than merely symbolic Messianism. It is the sentence of a holy God who cleanses His own House one last time in vigorous protest against its repulsive sordidness, to show His justification for abandoning it altogether later.

The judgment that occurred symbolically in the condemnation of the leafy, but unfruitful, fig tree, is repeated even more clearly in the judgment upon the nation's authorities. Like the barren fig tree, the important question and sole justification for the temple's continued existence, was its real usefulness. It is NOW

performing the task for which it was created? If not, it must be cleansed or pruned a year or so, and then eliminated (cf. Luke 13:6-9).

4. His act is concretely practical. Like a snowplow laboring to reach isolated communities starving for essential provisions for life, Jesus was bull-dozing aside all that hindered needy Gentiles from reaching the life-giving God of Israel. All that blocked access to God must be ruthlessly removed, regardless of the apparent validity of the rationalizations used to justify it.

Could there be any connection between this cleansing of the temple and the fact that various religious groups, notably the Essene community, were out of fellowship with the temple and refused it because of the corrupt priesthood and the profaned worship that took place there? (Cf. Maggioni, *Luca*, 247.) They affirmed that the true temple was the community, especially theirs, and that true worship was a godly life and observance of the law (without temple observances, of course). For these Hebrew monks, however, the temple had to be replaced by a pure community, because the former had been profaned. But Jesus shows the Essenes to be mistaken, because, so long as the Jerusalem temple stood, it was the true route of access to God and might not be substituted until God's purposes for its existence had been realized. Rather than substitute something else for it, He cleansed it.

Jesus desired to prepare God's House once more for use as a TEMPLE, where silence and orderliness facilitated reverent worship or teaching. The uproar of the market made prayer impossible, so the people of God effectually robbed the humble, seeking Gentiles of their opportunity to satisfy the haunting longing of their soul by prayer in a suitable atmosphere conducive to access to the living God. Was it likely that the prayer of Psalm 67 could be prayed or answered?

5. Why cleanse the temple? Because it was Passover! If there ever were a time when preparation for the Feast of Unleavened Bread should include the elimination of the old leaven, it was now. Jesus must sweep away all the old leaven of human selfishness, the meaningless external observances and the private interest linked with money and power, all flourishing at the expense of zeal for God's House (cf. I Cor. 5:6-8).

FACT QUESTIONS

1. According to Mark, from where were Jesus and His disciples coming when they entered the temple?
2. Whom did Jesus find in the temple that should not have been there?
3. In precisely what part of the temple was the abuse taking place? How do you know?
4. Why were these people there? Did they supply a need for the worshippers? If so, what?
5. What was so wrong about what was done by the people Jesus drove out of the temple?
6. Name some Old Testament heroes who had taken similar vigorous action to protect the holiness of God and that which had been dedicated to Him?
7. According to Mark, Jesus took the offensive not only against the sellers and moneychangers, but also against others. Who were these and why did Jesus attack them too?
8. What two passages of Scripture did Jesus cite to justify His actions?
9. What are the similarities and differences between John's account of the temple cleansing and those of Matthew, Mark and Luke (cf. John 2:13-25)?
10. What effect did the temple cleansing have upon the chief priests and scribes?
11. What effect did it have upon the simple, common people?
12. After the cleansing of the temple, who approached Jesus to be helped by Him? What sort of help did they seek?
13. Who continued to keep up the popular enthusiasm expressed during the triumphal entry the day before? What slogans were being shouted? What did the words mean?
14. What was the basis of the objections the religious authorities raised to the cries of the children?
15. What answer did Jesus give to justify what the children were saying? Where did He get His answer? What did He mean to communicate by it?
16. Where did Jesus go after the cleansing of the temple?
17. How did Jesus busy Himself for the rest of the day in the temple after cleansing it (Luke 19:47f.; Mark 11:18)?
18. According to Mark and Luke, how did the rulers of the people react to Jesus' bold defense of His cleansing the temple?

19. According to Mark and Luke, how did the common people react to Jesus?
20. Where did Jesus go to spend the night? Who else lived there? When had He been there before? What else took place there connected with the life of Jesus?

SECTION 56

JESUS CURSES FIG TREE AND
TEACHES DISCIPLES FAITH

(Parallel: Mark 11:12-14, 20-25)

TEXT: 21:18-22

18 Now in the morning as he returned to the city, he hungered.
19 And seeing a fig tree by the way side, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only; and he saith unto it, Let there be no fruit from thee henceforward for ever. And immediately the fig tree withered away.

20 And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How did the fig tree immediately wither away?

21 And Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do what is done to the fig tree, but even if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea, it shall be done. 22 And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS

- a. If Matthew knew quite well that the cursing of the fig tree preceded the cleansing of the temple, rather than vice versa, what motives could have seemed valid to him to invert the chronological order of these events?
- b. If Jesus is the Son of God, or God incarnate as the Christians say, why was He hungry? Does God get hungry?!
- c. If Jesus is the Son of God, why did He approach the tree, as Mark admits, "to see if he could find anything on it"? Could he not have already known everything about it by using His presumed prophetic intuition? Should not the fact that He was disappointed by the tree be considered evidence against His possessing supernatural knowledge? If not, why not?
- d. By what right does Jesus permit Himself to gather fruit from a tree that does not belong to Him? What does the Law of Moses