

PTB2-Special2: “Den of Thieves” from Jesus.

Twice Jesus cleansed the temple, once recorded in the famous second chapter of John and immediately after the wedding feast at Cana, where the emphasis of Jesus was only the evil practice of making “My Father's House a House of Merchandising” (John 2:16)- -a clear warning for mega churches today and the many others who would make the selling of products “faith resources”; and the prime theme of this book taken from Matthew 21:13 where although God clearly established in Isaiah that His House was to be a “House of Prayer”, men had turned it into a Den of Thieves. Of course Matthew 21:13 is a quote from the Old Testament, partly from Isaiah 56:7 and partly from Jeremiah 7:11. In both of these cases, Jesus was more than critical of those who used the House of God for buying and selling, to make a profit if you would; however, beyond that, and you must consider the meaning in the original quote from Jeremiah in order to appreciate this, it was that all of God's people had made the House of God as a Hideout from the justice of God on their own evil ways. After all, once you neglect the message of God through Jeremiah to “amend your ways”, then the totality of your ways and way of life become suspect when you come to any House of God for all reason or motivation than to pray to God or worship God. How prayer to God and worship of God are related will be more a subject for the later chapter on “House of Prayer in Isaiah”.

1-1: Jesus' Zeal for the House of God.

Here we find Psalm 69:9 quoted in John 2:17 with a positive twist to the cleansing of the temple, and an obvious reference to what the disciples already knew about Jesus and the Old Testament. Also we are reminded of the similarity of this incident near the beginning to the later incident of Matthew 21: (1) in both incidents Jesus was angered by those who bought and sold in the temple, and (2) the quote in the first cleansing incident mentions zeal for the House of God with a quote from Psalm 69:9 and the second cleansing incident, near the end, mentions the House of God as a House of Prayer with a quote from Isaiah 56:7. God's House or Houses was never intended to be by God a place for buying and selling, a place for profit and gain. Even as in the early incident, Jesus cleansed the temple of (1) those who sold oxen and sheep and (2) the money changers, so in the second cleansing incident (1) Jesus drove out of the temple of God those who bought and sold in the Temple, (2) He overturned the tables of the money changers, and (3) overturned the seats of those who sold doves. While in the first incident of John 2, Jesus also drove the sheep and oxen out of the Temple, we are not told for certain if the doves were let lose. What is consistent in both is the displeasure of Jesus and God for those who would buy and sell in the Temple, also for the money changers who made money from visitors of afore in exchange for the proper temple coin.

Of course, the primary message if you consider only these cleansing incidents apart from the obvious reference to the famous Temple Message of Jeremiah in Matthew 21:13 and from Jeremiah 7:11 {with Isaiah 56:7}, is that while God intended for His designated places of prayer and worship to be just for that, men had created the environment to the extent that it was a place to buy and sell, a place of profit if you would. {Do you see any of that today in the mega-churches where similar merchandising is done in the House of God, or when you noted CEO's and others who enhance their reputations and contacts at large churches, or when ladies groups use the church to promote their "faith resources", or even when pastors and evangelists use the church as a means for their own personal gain and to make disciples to themselves?}

1. Jesus Zeal for the House of God in John 2:17 and Psalm 69:9.

a. John 2:17.

"Then His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.'"

A little personal note here from the Apostle John, and one consistent with his purpose to present all the signs for believed in Jesus, also with the ulterior motive of Jesus always to create believing disciples. Either John interviewed the disciples later to recall that at this exact point they remembered Psalm 69:9, or since he was there he also remembered.

b. Psalm 69:9.

"I have become a stranger to my brothers, and an alien to my mother's children; because zeal for Your house has eaten me up, and the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me." (Psalm 69:8,9)

At one point (John 7) Jesus own brothers did not believe in Him, and taunted Him because He did not show Himself more openly in Judaea, Jerusalem, and the Temple, so I am sure the Apostle John also remembered this part of Psalm 69:8,9--"become a stranger to my brothers", etc.--along with the zeal of Jesus for the House of God that was eating Him up every time that He saw God's House as a "Place of Merchandising" or a "Den of Thieves". And while we still have not come to see the aspect Jesus condemned of making the House of God a "Hideout from the Justice of God" as clearly taught in the famous Temple Message of Jeremiah, you can bet that Jesus remembered it as did also the disciples.

Surely however, you do see how the religious leaders were angered by these two temple cleansings by Jesus. It stirred the pot violently, we might say; and whatever you get from a reading of the context of Psalm 69, you did get the build up of this animosity toward Jesus, even originally also toward God, that finally lead to His rejection and crucifixion by His own people of the Jewish nation: (1) in 69:1 the waters are coming up to the neck of Jesus; (2) in 69:2 Jesus is in deep mire without solid footing, into deep waters, and the floods are flowing over Him; (3) in 69:3 Jesus is weary with crying, His throat is dry, and His eyesight is blurred; (4) those that hate Him without cause are more than the hairs on His head, and those that would destroy Him are in power and mighty (69:4); (5) shame has covered the face of Jesus (69:7); (6) Jesus has inherited the reproaches that previously fell on God (69:9b); and (7) Jesus is eaten up inside His innermost being, far more than we realize as we read the two incidents of temple cleansing in John and Matthew, by His religious zeal and expectations for the House of God as compared to what He sees the people of God doing in that Temple.

NOTE: We must consider how churches and denominations where the House of Worship and Prayer has become either a place of merchandising or a Hideout first started with a rejection of the authority of Jesus and God over their church. Surely you have noticed the growing gap between Jesus and churches!

2. Jesus recognition of what God had meant as a House of Prayer made by men into a "Den of Thieves" of Matthew 21:13, Jeremiah 7:11, and Isaiah 56:7.

a. Matthew 21:13.

"And He said to them, 'It is written, My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of thieves.'" (Matthew 21:13)

b. Jeremiah 7:11.

"Has this house, which is called by My name, become a den of thieves in your eyes? Behold, I, even I, have seen it,; says the LORD." (Jeremiah 7:11)

You must notice: (1) that this is God Himself talking here as God says "this house...called by My name" {**you know we must also consider that any desecration of a House of God for profit and gain or as a Hideout is also a desecration of the name of God Himself, another way if you please of taking the name of God in vain**}; (2) that God sees that the concept of most of the people of God during the time of Jeremiah was that the House of God was a Hideout or a "Den of Thieves"; and (3) God says I am looking at it for Myself, "I have seen it", says the LORD God. You dare not imagine that the omnipotent and all-seeing God of Jeremiah and the period of united kingdoms does not

see today houses of worship as well as He did the Temple of Solomon, or later the Temple of Jesus' day. In fact much of the history of the teachings of God and Jesus are centered around the Temple with expansions in concept to both a living temple of people and a place for worship in the new world. These we must consider as we progress in the book! The fact that God has not punished your church nor America as He did Judah and Jerusalem with Captivity and Temple destruction by the Babylonians or as He did Israel and the Temple with destruction from the Romans is due to both the patience of God and the fact that the predominate method of God after Jesus is to ignore those who have rejected Him. It is called a "casting away" in Jesus' teachings of the church as the vineyard of John 14. Either branches are pruned or they are cast away. **{Be fearful lest you and your church have been cast away, and you do not even have eyes to see or ears to hear what has happened for eternity!}**

c. Isaiah 56:7.

"...For My House shall be called a House of prayer for all nations." (Isaiah 56:7)

From reading this verse and the obvious meaning of the context of Isaiah 56 which is futuristic for the new earth and the new Jerusalem where all nations come to worship, we would think that Jesus had misquoted Isaiah; yet with the glaring phrase of "House of Prayer", we must zero in on this chapter. And what we find in this chapter, as we will study in more detail in the later chapter on "House of Prayer" in Isaiah, is that all along God and Jesus had in mind an eternal house of prayer, not made with hands; and that any temporal and man-made house or houses of God such as churches and congregations were to be in the will of God only representatives of the Great Temple in the New Jerusalem to come!

In fact one of the unique contributions of Isaiah is the way Isaiah blends the judgments of God on all the nations and finally the world at the end intermittent with glimmers of hope for the new world and the New Temple and Jerusalem. For example in Isaiah 53, it is the darkness and gloom of "who has believed our report" from Isaiah with the suffering servant Jesus to follow in the same chapter, then an invitation to abundant life in Isaiah 55 and salvation for the Gentiles with a New and eternal House of Prayer in Isaiah 56. **{We rapidly scan Isaiah in the House of Prayer chapter to illustrate this interlude of gloom and hope for God's People, Jews and Gentiles.}**

By the way, it is not so much suggested that God promises Captivity or even national punished for the United States as He did for Judah and Israel through Jeremiah and the other Prophets; but rather that the next great and sure judgment of God is against the whole world of which the United States must be part. All of this old world with the heavens above is going to be destroyed by fire, with all the works and creations of man

destroyed including all the houses of God that men have constructed in the name of God; and since that is really not far off as indicated by what must come first, the Falling Away and the revelation of the man of sin, God is patiently waiting to rain proper justice with the Second Coming of Christ where the tares are separated from the wheat. Now, that God may withdraw His umbrella of protection over the United States as He did at 9/11 is a possibility, however once again there is not much time left for that to happen. Since surely the Fullness of the Gentiles is almost complete, a movement of history from God Himself as the US was used to spread the gospel to every nation, then the blessings of God that come with such usage must also begin to wane and pass away. We look for more and more focus on the Middle East for the blessings and signs from God; and although we may think of the United States as the center of the Universe, that was only temporal, and we must know that God has a lot for that spot in Jerusalem where He will eventually like the Apostle John saw and wrote about in the book of Revelation lower His New Jerusalem to rest on Mount Zion.

1-2: The Sign of the Temple.

Even as John wove the life of Christ around signs, the Jewish leaders also sought signs.

1. To the Jewish religious leaders and most of the Jews during the days of Jesus to threaten destruction of the Temple was sacri-religious, and you will find among church members today this same protective attitude. Of course the attitude of "protect the local church", opposing all criticism of it, is a heritage from Rich Warren along with his Purpose driven life and church where Purpose has taken the place of Christ or the Holy Spirit. What we begin to see in this Bible study is that the Temple of God and any House of God is not as sacred as we thought at first; that they are more creations of man than of God; that God has another place for His full dwelling place; and it is what they represent as forecasters of the eternal House of God which is important, and only as long as that is what they represent and not as a Hideout for a people of God who desire not to do what God plainly tells in the first place.

2. Yet Jesus spiritualized. He was not talking about the destruction of this particular Temple built by Herod; although later, He would as recorded in Matthew 24 speak of the inevitable destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem by the Roman government, warning Jewish believers to flee to the hills as they saw the approaching army of Rome. This spiritualizing of the Temple as His own body, clearly explained by Jesus in John 2:31,32, is something we must apply also to the House of God, to our own Houses of God or local churches and denominations. The goal of Christ for your place of worship is much larger than what you see that men have built, that is if it is representative of the eternal house to come; and the bottom line use you make of that house, for either a hideout or a place of profit or as a house of prayer, determines how representative in

the final analysis it is to the place of Eternal Worship in the New Jerusalem. No, this is not sentimental, it is real; and it is Biblical, and it is true!

3. If most church members were deeply convinced that their church building is a house of God, belonging and dedicated to God, the moment you expressed yourself as a follower of Christ you would automatically be accepted as a worshipper there with equal rights of any other member. Such is not the case, and you know it! While you might go there and immediately feel that you belong since you belong to God and this is His house, they would quickly in many ways, pastor and people, let you know that you are an outsider until you have gone through the rituals of their required church membership; and as they only make the decision as to whether you belong in God's house. You see this is just one evidence of how contemporary churches have denied the teachings of Christ on "oneness" as clearly set out in John 14 and following. While Jesus intended that the world might see this love and unity among all Christian believers as a testimony to the Lord Jesus Christ, it because of such attitudes and practices of exclusiveness and protection by church members has become the opposite. There is not the inevitable evangelism that comes from oneness: there is the lack of evangelism and faith in Christ that comes from such exclusiveness! **{A beginning for the cure might be when a greeter for a local church would say to a visitor, "If you are a Christian you are already a member here", come in and belong and worship with us in this House of Prayer for God!}**

1-3: Signs of Scripture and Teachings.

Jesus' Teachings and the Scriptural Predictions about the same are also "signs" in the Gospel of John. Surely you are coming to see that the "signs" that the Apostle John had in mind in his stated purpose for writing, the signs for believing, go far beyond the 7 miracles that he carefully chose to weave the teachings and doings of Jesus around. After the Jews **{short for Jewish leaders, but originally a short for "from Jerusalem"}** asked Jesus for a sign to back His authority to cleanse the temple; and after Jesus told them that if this temple was destroyed, then in three days Jesus would raise it back up; and after the Jews responded what how it took 46 years to build Herod's Temple; then John reminds us that Jesus was forecasting a sign, the sign of the Temple of His body. And once again we have a spiritualized concept of Temple and House that goes far beyond a church building where the body of Jesus and the eternal House of God become more important than what some men have built, even dedicated as a place of worship for God. **{Of course the real dedication comes only when God's people who worship there have amended their ways as advised by God through Jeremiah and in the Temple Message.}**

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

You see then the place of Scriptures and the teachings of Jesus as signs to lead disciples to believe in Jesus. Here it is the many predictions of the Old Testament clearly fulfilled in the New Testament about the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

1-4. The “Den of Thieves” Incident of Matthew 21.

1. Jesus went into, Matthew says, “the temple of God”. (Matthew 21:12)

Jesus felt that since it was a temple that belonged to God, it also belonged to Him; and He automatically had the authority to: (1) drive out all those who bought and sold in the temple; (2) to overturn the tables of the money changers; and (3) the seats of those who sold doves. Those who sold doves were punished most mildly as only the seats were overturned, the money changers more severely as their tables were overturned, but those who bought and sold in the temple most severely as Jesus actually drove them out of the temple. In reality and in all probability, what we see is that the whole group was driven out, then Jesus took care of their tables and seats.

2. Jesus quoted from Jeremiah 7:11 and Isaiah 56:7 as justification for His actions.

a. Isaiah 56:7 identified the temple as a “house of prayer” as what God had ordained it to be called, actually a house of prayer and worship.

b. Actually Jesus didn’t call these kinds of people--moneychangers and sellers in the temple of doves--a “Den of Thieves”--but He said that “they” had made it a Den of Thieves. Even as in Jeremiah and Jeremiah 7:11, it was the people who created the atmosphere so that it became in their own eyes a Den of Thieves. It was the mental image that they had of prayer and worship as a time and place to make a profit, that in turn created their custom of a place like a hideout for thieves, where they could do bad things then hide for refuge in the place of God.

3. Matthew passes quickly to the crowd that came to Jesus. It was “the blind and lame”. Jesus healed them. (Matthew 21:14)

4. Then Matthew concentrates on the “wonderful things” that Jesus did **{this is of course an interpretation under the inspiration of God of what activities Jesus participated in the healing process, not from the “chief priests and scribes” although they are the ones, Matthew writes, that saw them.}**

- a. The children were crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!".
- b. This made the chief priests and scribes "indignant".
- c. "Do you hear what they are saying, Jesus?" they said to Him. (21:16)

d. Like Jesus did confronting Satan, He quoted Old Testament Scripture from Psalm 8:2 the famous saying, "Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants you have perfected praise."

e. Jesus left them, went out of Jerusalem to the city of Bethany and lodged there. (21:17)

5. However, it was not over, for when He came back into the temple the next morning, these same chief priests and elders of the people wanted to know, "By what authority are you doing these things." (21:23)

What were the things? No doubt the whole works: (1) cleansing of the temple, (2) healing in the temple, (3) the killing of the fig tree the next morning after the temple incident (Matthew 21:18,19). **{Jesus was hungry, Matthew writes, but when He walked over to the fig tree for something to eat, there was nothing but leaves.}** Surely it is not coincidental that Jesus took out His angry **{remember John called it zeal for the house of God in the first incident as recorded in John 2}** on the fig tree rather than the people in the temple; yet we know from the incidents in the Garden that at any moment He could have called legions of angels to assist Himself, much less the power that He Himself exercises over natural laws. And like everything else Jesus did, it was for the benefit of the disciples, and for our benefit, as a teaching lesson, that Jesus said, "Let no fruit grown on you ever again". (Matthew 21:19) It was both a "fruit that remains" lesson like in John 15, and a guarantee of the nature of the destruction of the temple and the burnt sacrifices to happen in 70 A.D., the abomination of desolation predicted by Daniel. In reality based on Zechariah and Daniel, it was a binding judgment that Jesus placed on Jerusalem and Israel. Israel and Jerusalem was symbolized by the fig tree, without fruit and only an appearance of profit with leaves but dead. Immediately the curse took place, and the fig tree withered, which marveled the disciples (21:20)

When they saw it, not at all normal and natural, the disciples asked, "How did this happen so fast?" (21:21)

Jesus gave a lesson on faith and prayer. It was possible to do greater works than this with prayer and faith, "ask in prayer, believing, you will receive" (21:22), as it was also possible to remove mountains.

6. Jesus' reply to the questioning of His authority was a trick question: "I will tell you if you will tell me whether the baptism of John, that is the authority that John the Baptist had to baptize for the repentance of sins, was from men or from God **{actually the translation is from heaven which is the equivalent}**. Neither told, for as these leaders reasoned among themselves that if the answer was "from heaven", then Jesus would ask them what they did not believe John; and if "from men", the multitude who accepted John as a prophet would be angry at them. So Jesus agreed also not to answer when they said, "We do not know." (21:27)

7. It is intentional that Jesus then told 3 parables, one with a quote from Psalm 118:22,23. In fact the series of teachings started with "But what do you think?" addressed to these same leaders of the Jews. **{Matthew does not use that word in chapter 21 and 22.}**

a. The parable of the two sons compared the tax collectors and harlots who believed John as he preached on the way of righteousness; yet these leaders, Jesus told them did not believe. (Matthew 21:7-32)

b. Then the parable of the wicked vinedressers where when the owner sent at harvest time the servants to collect the fruit; but the vinedressers, obviously these same leaders, beat one servant, killed one, and stoned another; and this rejection process went on until they also killed the son of the owner. **{Is not the parallel to God the Father and Jesus obvious? How the Jews rejected the very Son of God?}** Again Jesus addressed the religious leaders.

"Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vinedressers?" (Matthew 21:40)

Their reply was automatic: "They said to Him, 'He will destroy those wicked men miserably, and leave his vineyard to other vinedressers who will render to him the fruits in their seasons". (Matthew 21:41) **{The same profit makes in the temple compound were not about to admit of a business operation except where a profit should be made by the owner.}**

c. Jesus then quotes Psalm 118:22,23 and tells the Jews plainly that "the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation bearing the fruits of it. With an additional word about personal and individual salvation: how that whoever falls on the

stone, the stone of the quote from the Psalm above, will be broken; however whoever the stone falls on will be ground into powder. (Matthew 21:44)

d. The quote from Psalm 118:22,23.

"The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the LORD's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.'?"

Does this not relate it all? Nation, and believers, and Temple, and Gentiles and Jews, and salvation.

NOTE: And the next parable, that of the wedding feast, and the "good and bad" guests who came, we will save for the conclusions of the last chapter, "God's 'Called' People versus God's 'Chosen' People. (Matthew 22:1-14)

